

FROM GRADUATE TO EMPLOYEE: EXPLORING THE JOURNEYS OF FIRST-TIME ENTRANTS INTO THE LABOUR MARKET

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Graduate employability is high on the agenda of higher education, governments, employers as well as students and their parents. This is in part due to the apparent need for knowledge workers in a labour market serving a knowledge economy as well as the contradictory rise of graduate un- and underemployment globally. Against this background higher education is experiencing pressure to deliver employable graduates. This study explores the journeys of graduates into first-time employment, journeys considered to be complicated transitions. My exploration was framed by the following research question: What were the experiences of first-time entrants into the labour market during their transition from graduate to employee? I aim to contribute to the current body of knowledge on graduate employability by elaborating on the experiences of 46 graduates during their transition into employment.

The research was conducted according to a qualitative interpretive approach. During 2015 I conducted semi-structured interviews of approximately forty minutes each with all the participants. Analytic induction was used to uncover categories and themes in the data set. Further analysis was done according to three theoretical approaches.

This dissertation is presented in the form of three articles framed by an introductory and a concluding chapter. The first article views graduate employability from an emerging identity perspective and considers the strategies the graduates employed to graduate successfully and to secure employment. In addition to the thematic analysis I developed a trajectory of emerging identity for each graduate. These trajectories signified mostly complex journeys in need of careful negotiation. The importance of a graduate identity and the continuing development of such an identity were highlighted.

The second article employs a career management approach with a focus on how the graduates perceived success in the workplace, and on higher education's contribution to their careers. From the analysis it was evident that thinking about possible careers and engagement with career management processes was only initiated at or after graduation. The graduates regarded higher education as

invaluable in terms of securing employment and for whole-person development, but not in terms of their career success.

The third article utilises Yosso's community cultural wealth approach to explicate how graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds use their community networks and resources to secure employment and build a successful career path. Instead of considering these graduates' resources as deficient, higher education institutions should acknowledge their capitals and use it as a basis for support in making the transition into employment.

Graduates were explicit about the 'gap' between higher education and employment and the lack of institutional support in bridging this gap. Little or no mention was made about interventions supporting students during this journey. This study confirms the need for an extension of the graduate journey up to first-time employment and the need for institutional support along the journey into employment.

OPSOMMING

Die indiensneembaarheid van graduandi is hoog op die agenda van hoër onderwys, regerings, werkgewers sowel as studente en hul ouers. Dit is deels as gevolg van 'n klaarblyklike behoefte aan kenniswerkers in 'n arbeidsmark wat gedryf word deur 'n kennisekonomie, asook die teenstrydige toename in werkloosheid en onderindiensneming van gegradueerdes wêreldwyd. Teen hierdie agtergrond ervaar hoër onderwys druk om indiensneembare graduandi te lewer. Hierdie studie ondersoek die roetes van afgestudeerdes van universiteit tot aanvangsindiensneming, roetes wat as kompleks beskou word. Die studie is deur die volgende navorsingsvraag gelei: Wat was die ervarings van aanvangsdeelnemers aan die arbeidsmark tydens die oorgang van gegradueerde tot werknemer? In hierdie studie poog ek om 'n bydrae te lewer tot bestaande kennis oor die indiensneembaarheid van gegradueerdes deur die ervaringe van ses-en-veertig gegradueerdes tydens hul oorgang na die werkplek te ondersoek.

Die navorsing is volgens 'n kwalitatiewe interpretatiewe benadering uitgevoer. Gedurende 2015 het ek semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude van ongeveer veertig minute elk met die deelnemers gevoer. Analitiese induksie is gebruik om kategorieë en temas in die datastel te identifiseer. Verdere analise is volgens drie teoretiese raamwerke gedoen.

Die dissertasie word aangebied in die vorm van drie artikels binne die raamwerk van 'n inleidende en 'n slofhoofstuk. In die eerste artikel word indiensneembaarheid vanuit 'n ontluikende gegradueerde-identiteit perspektief beskou en is die fokus op die strategieë wat studente gebruik het om suksesvol te gradueer asook om in diens geneem te word. Tesame met die tematiese analise het ek ook 'n trajek van ontluikende identiteit vir elke deelnemer ontwikkel. Hierdie trajekte het op meestal komplekse roetes gedui wat met omsigtigheid hanteer behoort te word. Die belangrikheid van 'n gegradueerde-identiteit en die voortdurende ontwikkeling van sodanige identiteit is beklemtoon.

Die tweede artikel gebruik 'n loopbaansbestuursbenadering met die fokus op gegradueerdes se perspektief op sukses in die werkplek asook hoër onderwys se bydrae tot sodanige sukses. Die ontleding het aangedui dat die deelnemers

hoofsaaklik eers met of na graadaflugging aandag geskenk het aan hul loopbane en bestuursaspekte daarvan. Die gegradueerdes het hoër onderwys as waardevol beskou ten opsigte van indiensneming en hul persoonlike ontwikkeling, maar nie noodwendig ten opsigte van loopbaansukses nie.

Die derde artikel dui vanuit Yosso se gemeenskaps-kulturele rykdom benadering aan hoe gegradueerdes van agtergeblewe gemeenskappe hul gemeenskaps-netwerke en bronne ontplooi het om in diens geneem te word en 'n suksesvolle loopbaan te bou. In plaas daarvan om hierdie gegradueerdes se bronne as ontoereikend te beskou, behoort hoër onderwys instellings hierdie studente se bronne te erken en te gebruik as basis van waar die studente ondersteun behoort te word in die oorgang na die werkplek.

Die gegradueerdes was uitgesproke oor die 'gaping' tussen hoër onderwys en die werksplek en die gebrek aan institusionele ondersteuning tydens die oorgang. Min tot geen verwysings is gemaak na ondersteuningsintervensies van studente tydens hierdie oorgang. Hierdie studie bevestig die noodsaaklikheid van 'n wyer perspektief op die roete van die student en gegradueerde tot en met indiensneming, en wys die noodsaaklikheid van institusionele ondersteuning aan gegradueerdes tydens die oorgang tot die werksplek, uit.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASGISA – Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa

BEE – Black Economic Empowerment

BIS – Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

CCW – Community Cultural Wealth

CHE – Council of Higher Education

CHEC – Cape Higher Education Consortium

CPUT – Cape Peninsula University of Technology

DHET – Department of Higher Education and Training

EDP – Employability Development Profile

EEA – Employment Equity Act

FGS – First Generation Student

FYA – Foundation for Young Australians

GDS – Graduation Destination Survey

GP – Gauteng Province

HE – Higher Education

HEIs – Higher Education Institutions

NDP – National Development Plan

NEET – Not in Employment, Education or Training

NHEIAS – National Higher Education Information and Application Service

NSFAS – National Student Financial Aid Scheme

PBL – Problem Based Learning

SA – South Africa

SU – Stellenbosch University

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

UCT – University of Cape Town

UK – United Kingdom

US – United States

UWC – University of the Western Cape

WC – Western Cape

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the study

The debate about the purpose of higher education (HE) is ongoing and unresolved (Hager, Holland & David 2002). Historically higher education institutions (HEIs) have seen their mission as three-fold, namely the production, transferral and application of knowledge (Hager et al. 2002; CHE 2014). In the past preparation for the world of work has not been regarded as the only, or even the main function of HE. In the 21st century, however, the prevailing assumption is that universities should primarily prepare graduates for first-time employment (Mihut 2015; Tomlinson 2012), mainly due to dramatic changes in the labour market in response to globalisation, technological advances, competitive pressures and the shift towards a knowledge economy (Bridgstock 2009). Society currently views HE as the training ground for vocational and professional skills (Chan, Brown & Ludlow 2014), and so contributing to the human capital needs of the world of work.

Whereas the focus in this study is on graduate employability and the role of HE with regard to graduate employability, I do not contend that graduate employability is the only purpose or even the main purpose of HE. That said, graduate employability is a contemporary issue which impacts HE and the role of HE concerning graduate employability should be deliberated. In response to the continuous pressure on HE to prepare graduates for the world of work, Blessinger (2015b) maintains that the ultimate purpose of HE is to promote personal agency through the development of freedom and responsibility. He views students entering HE as global citizens and believes that HEIs should act as global institutions that promote personal agency by developing practices that integrate different goals such as educating for high academic standards, employability, global citizenry and human development (cf 2.2 The labour market and higher education). This ties in with Barnett's (2004) perspective that 'learning' can only be understood in terms of human qualities and dispositions. The development of personal agency through HE contributes to the process of development which continues both formally and informally throughout the student's life (Blessinger 2015b; Holmes 2015).

Worldwide it is generally accepted that HE determines graduates' life chances (Marginson 2007; Parry 2005), in other words, contributes to the private good. This emphasis on the private good of HE is promoted by students' and their parents' exposure to statistics and media headlines pointing to HE as the key to economic prosperity. According to the director of the United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Africa, "(u)pgrading people's higher education and skills will increase economic opportunities that will help the youth who are the architects of tomorrow's Africa" (Kigotho 2015a:1). This does not only apply to Africa. Globally, adults with tertiary qualifications experience better labour market outcomes than those without such qualifications (Maslen 2015; OECD 2014, 2015). Thus, HE is widely considered to be the principal vehicle to employment and a prosperous life.

One of the most evident developments in the HE landscape over the past few decades is the shift from elite to mass education, reflecting a change in mindset from elitism and exclusivity towards diversity and inclusivity (Blessinger 2015a, 2015b). The massification of HE coincided with a shift towards a knowledge-driven economy. The result of this shift towards a knowledge-driven economy is increased pressure on HE to deliver employable graduates with specific vocational skills (Tomlinson 2012). Against the background of the massification of HE it seems logical that a bigger demand for graduates would be satisfied by an increase in the number of students in HE. This is, however, not the case. Mourshed, Farrell and Barton (2013) hint at "two related global crises" namely 1) high levels of youth unemployment, and 2) a shortage of people with critical job skills.

Illustrating the first crisis a McKinsey report (Mourshed et al. 2013) highlights that more than half of young people in Greece, Spain and South Africa are unemployed, while jobless levels of more than 25 per cent are common in Europe, the Middle-East, and Northern Africa. In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries fifteen percent of youth between the ages of 15 and 29 are not in employment, education or training (NEET) (OECD 2016). The International Labour Organisation estimates that globally 75 million young people are unemployed (Mourshed et al. 2013).

One would assume that the phenomenon of unemployment would mainly be prevalent amongst young people without tertiary qualifications. However, various

studies refer to rising levels of graduate unemployment globally (Baldry 2015; Botha 2015; Chillias, Marks & Galloway 2015; Sin, Tavares & Amaral 2016; Varghese, Panigrahi & Heslop 2015). The average unemployment rate for graduates from OECD countries stood at 7.4 per cent in 2014 (OECD 2015), while the unemployment rate for graduates from African universities currently is 25 per cent (Kigotho 2015c; McCowan 2014). In 2013 South Africa (SA) had a graduate unemployment rate of six per cent. Although this percentage seems low in comparison to the rest of Africa, it is noteworthy that in the last quarter of 2008 graduate unemployment in SA had been only three per cent. This means that unemployment amongst graduates in SA has doubled in four years (Van Broekhuizen 2013). The reality of graduate unemployment in SA is evident in media reports such as the story of graduates who are taking to the streets to find employment after they had no response to 'hundreds' of job applications (Madibogo 2016:1).

The second crisis refers to a critical shortage of scarce skills. Employers complain that graduates are not equipped with the skills needed in the knowledge economy. According to the McKinsey report (Mourshed et al. 2013), a shortfall of 85 million high and middle skilled workers will exist globally by 2020. In SA skills shortages are indicated in construction and engineering industries, amongst others (Taylor, Fleisch & Shindler 2007). A report on *The New Work Order* (FYA 2015) by the Foundation for Young Australians states that 60 per cent of students are being educated for jobs that will not exist by the time they graduate. It seems as if globally a gap exists between what graduates learn and the knowledge and skills needed in the workplace (Brookes 2015; Kigotho 2016; Mourshed et al. 2013; Rogan & Reynolds 2015).

These two global crises give rise to, amongst others, the following confounding questions: How do graduates experience their transition into first-time employment? How do graduates cope with the pressure to secure appropriate employment? Which factors shape their journeys into employment? The journey from education to employment is considered a complicated one (Leuze 2010; Mourshed et al. 2013) with many different pathways leading to employment. Different routes have different requirements and challenges that need to be negotiated. Mourshed and others (2013) point out that many students get lost along the way since little clarity exists on

which practices and interventions are effective in making the transition from education to employment. Research highlights a paucity of empirical data on how to support students during this transition (Mourshed et al. 2013; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios 2015) and how students perceive their own employability (Dacre Pool, Qualter & Sewell 2014; Holmes 2013a). Thorough empirical examination of theoretical models analysing employability is also lacking (Dacre Pool et al. 2014; Teichler 1999), while Tomlinson and Holmes (2016) point to a need for sound theory that explicates causality between factors influencing employability and observed employment outcomes.

In this study, the journeys of first-time entrants into the labour market are explored. I¹ aim to contribute to the current body of knowledge on graduate employability by elaborating on the experiences of 46 graduates during their transition from HE into employment. I explore the graduates' journeys by explicating their experiences during HE, their thoughts on possible careers while in HE and how they approached their search for employment. Central to the study are the graduates' perspectives on their success in employment as well as the contribution of HE to their career path. I suggest that this study could assist graduates in fostering more realistic expectations of the transition into employment as well as how to prepare themselves better for the journey. The findings of this study could also guide HEIs on how to more effectively support and prepare graduates for this journey. The perspectives of the participants could further contribute to employers' understanding of the graduate journey and how they can better support graduates during this transition. The engagement with three theoretical approaches provides a sound theoretical foundation for the study and may produce knowledge about the graduates' transitions into first-time employment with explanatory power and possibilities for practical action. The use of the theories may further expound the value of each of the theories in understanding the concept of graduate employability as more than a technical concept.

Following this introduction, I firstly explicate the changed labour market in which graduates have to function. Secondly, I analyse the response of higher education, internationally and nationally, to the demands to deliver employable graduates.

¹ In Chapters one, two and five I use the first person to report on the research. Since Chapters three to five are in the form of publishable articles, I use 'we' to include my supervisor as co-author.

Thirdly, I consider different theoretical approaches to the concept, ‘graduate employability’. Fourthly, I expand on the research process. Finally, I explain the structure of the dissertation which is presented as three articles, and conclude with final remarks about the study.

1.2 The profile of a changed labour market

Since the end of the 20th century, changes in the labour market have been informed by a shift towards a post-industrialised knowledge-driven economy in need of individuals with specific, mainly high-level skills and knowledge (Bridgstock 2009; Brown, Hesketh & Williams 2003; Castells & Cardoso 2005; Tomlinson 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012). In the knowledge economy the emphasis is on knowledge workers who supply and manage their own knowledge to produce optimal results in the labour market. Knowledge is considered a capital which can enhance economic return for individuals and countries as well as contribute to the general wellbeing of those who have acquired the knowledge (Brown & Hesketh 2004).

Some scholars problematize the view of a labour market as being only knowledge-driven. Brown and Hesketh (2004) argue that in the United States for every job requiring a degree, there are almost three that do not require a degree, and so contradict the high skills, high value-added claims of the knowledge-based economy. They continue by highlighting that the supply of knowledge workers far exceed the need for knowledge workers. Brown and Lauder (2012:48) refer to this as “the death of human capital” with human capital implying the skills and knowledge an individual has acquired. They contend that there is little evidence in support of the rising value of human capital considering that leading transnational companies restructure their global operations to deliver innovative ideas at low cost, resulting in a reduced demand for human capital. Regardless of these arguments, it seems as if globally the needs of a knowledge-based economy continue to shape the labour market (Cloete 2015; Holmes 2015; Griesel & Parker 2009).

Labour markets globally being in continuous flux further complicates this scenario. In many industries and countries, the most sought after occupations did not exist ten years ago and the pace of job-related change is still accelerating. According to the World Economic Forum (2016), we are finding ourselves at the beginning of a Fourth

Industrial Revolution in which technological development is one of the major drivers of change. Socio-economic, geo-political and demographic developments such as ageing societies, natural resource constraints and rapid urbanisation are cited as drivers of change with an impact on the labour market almost equivalent to that of technological innovation (World Economic Forum 2016). Within this fluctuating labour market, traditional career structures involving linear progression through one organisation are becoming less common (Bridgstock 2009; Hager et al. 2002), and career structures are increasingly described as 'flexible' (Tomlinson 2012). The implication of changing labour markets is that individual workers must constantly adapt to 'new' work environments and requirements. These requirements include rapidly evolving technical and social skills sets (Tomlinson 2012; World Economic Forum 2016).

A continuously fluctuating employment landscape also characterises the South African labour market that is furthermore challenged by a subdued economy, high unemployment rates, as well as persistent disparities along gender and racial lines. In 2016 the gender gap in labour force participation is 13 per cent while women still earn on average 29 per cent less than men (OECD 2016). Although the number of skilled workers across all population groups has increased since the end of apartheid in 1994, the increase as a proportion of the number of people per group is uneven. In 2014 only 18 per cent of the black² workforce were skilled which is in stark contrast to the 61 per cent skilled workers in the white workforce (Statistics South Africa 2014).

The above figures demonstrate enduring inequities in the labour market due to the apartheid legacy. In 1998 the South African government introduced the Employment Equity Act (EEA) to deal with these disparities. The EEA had as aim the eradication of all forms of discrimination in the labour market as part of the process to achieve social justice. The idea was to fast track transformation in the workplace by favouring black, coloured and Indian people as well as women and people with disabilities (DOL 2016). In addition to the 1998 EEA, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) was introduced in 2003 with the aim of realising the country's full economic potential by

² In this study I use the term black to refer to black African people, white to refer to white Caucasian people and coloured to refer to people of mixed race. This is in accordance with the South African government classification of races namely: black African (B), Indian (I), white Caucasian (W), and Coloured (C) (person of mixed race).

bringing black, coloured and Indian people into the economic mainstream (DTI 2016).

A third example of a post-apartheid policy aimed at improving equality and equity in the workforce is the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA). ASGISA was launched in 2006 to address skilled labour shortages amplified by the legacy of apartheid and to lift barriers to competition in certain segments of the economy (Walker & Fongwa 2016). Despite these policy interventions, SA is still struggling to eradicate the persistent inequalities in the labour market and to create more employment opportunities by stimulating the economy. Van Broekhuizen (2013) holds that unemployment is one of the most tell-tale symptoms of economic, social, and developmental problems in a country. It is within this complex labour market that graduates in SA have to compete for jobs and negotiate their careers. In the next section I discuss the response of HE, internationally and nationally, to economic and labour market shifts.

1.3 Higher education and graduate employability

1.3.1 An international perspective

As pointed out earlier, the assumption that HE should prepare graduates for the world of work is prevalent in most countries in the world. In Australia, federal government policy initiatives virtually steered all Australian universities to develop statements of graduate attributes to enhance graduate employability (Hager et al. 2002). In the United Kingdom (UK), Enterprise in Higher Education was launched in December 1987 with the aim of encouraging HEIs in the UK to prepare undergraduates more effectively for their future careers (Editorial 1993). Most institutions in the UK thus have engaged with graduate attributes as a way of ensuring employability of their graduates (Holmes 2013a). In Europe the emphasis on graduate employability arose, amongst other factors, from the Bologna process and the establishment of the European Higher Education Area which had the promotion of employability amongst graduates of European HEIs as one of its main goals. This implied a stronger focus on employability of graduates at bachelor, masters and doctoral level (Stiwne & Alves 2010). In the United States (US), launching a career effectively upon graduation is a goal supported by various key

stakeholders. The National Association of Colleges and Employers, for example, is dedicated to the employment of graduates and makes available relevant information in support of graduate employability (BIS 2011). According to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the sheer quantity of this information suggests that graduate employability is a prime driver underpinning HE in the US. Similarly, literature points to an emphasis on graduate employability in Canada, New Zealand (BIS 2011), Vietnam (Tran 2015), Morocco (Sawahel 2016) and Malaysia (Abdullah 2009). This is also the case in South Africa (SA).

1.3.2 A national perspective

Since SA became a democracy in 1994, a vision of a more equitable, expanded and diverse education and training system has been pursued by policy-makers. A policy document, Education White Paper 3, was released in July 1997 explicating principles according to which HE was to contribute to the transformation and redress of the country. These principles included a focus on the learning need of individuals and the developmental needs of society and the labour market (DHET 1997). In November 2013, the Minister of Higher Education and Training released the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET 2013) in which these principles were reiterated. The HE system should contribute to building a fair, equitable, non-racial and non-sexist, democratic SA. HE in SA is thus seen as an integral role-player in the recovery process of the South African society (CHE 2014). In addition, the 2013 White Paper emphasises the contribution of HE to the development of the national economy (DHET 2013). This emphasis reconfirms the goals set out for HE in the National Development Plan (NPC 2011) which included the expansion of HE in order to produce more skilled workers. In support of the national economy investment in human capital in very specific areas such as space science and technology, energy security and global climate change has already been foreseen in 2007 in the DST report, *Innovation Towards a Knowledge-Based Economy: Ten-Year Plan for South Africa* (DST 2007). This means that the South African HE system, similar to global trends, also experiences pressure to fulfil the human resource needs of the labour market. From this point of view, the South African government expects HE to contribute to human capital development in the

country and to engage proactively with the skills needs of the economy (Griesel & Parker 2009; Pouris & Inglesi-Iotz 2014).

As elsewhere in the world HE in SA is therefore required to deliver employable graduates who are able to contribute to the economic and social development of the country. Evidence from HE documents indicates engagement with the issue of graduate employability from various perspectives. In a Council on Higher Education (2014) document, *Framework for Institutional Quality Enhancement in the Second Period of Quality Assurance*, student success is associated with graduate attributes which are personally, professionally and socially valuable. In the same document the relevance of curriculum content to support the development of graduate attributes is stated as follows: “Another important aspect of curriculum content is the identification and specification of outcomes and graduate attributes, including knowledge, skills, values and dispositions, and indications of how the curriculum is designed to enable students to attain them” (CHE 2014:18). Although not all universities have engaged with graduate employability to the same extent, it is certainly a priority of policymakers (CHE 2013).

1.4 Employability as an ongoing process

As already indicated, the concept of graduate employability affects both individuals and society at large. Despite the importance of graduate employability to many stakeholders it seems as if there is little consensus about the meaning of the concept. The review of literature highlights several theoretical approaches that attempt to uncover the concept of employability of graduates and present ways of developing and improving graduate employability. One approach that stands out as dominant is the skills approach (Holmes 2015). In this approach the focus is on the skills and attributes a graduate needs to acquire to be deemed employable. Although the skills approach appears to be adopted quite generally, I contend that viewing graduate employability from a developmental and processual perspective, rather than from a skills approach, is more useful. A developmental and processual approach to graduate employability would imply the development of the personal agency of the graduate, formally and informally through all aspects of the student experience, in order to become a responsible citizen prepared for the world of work. My view is supported by Bridgstock (2009) who considers the skills approach as

narrow and with a focus on short-term employment outcomes. For her, the concept of graduate employability implies an ongoing process of reflection, evaluation, decision-making and continuous development. In this study I therefore employ three theoretical approaches to graduate employability based on developmental, constructional and iterative processes.

The three theoretical approaches that provide useful lenses to analyse the data and develop an understanding of the graduates' transition into employment are 1) Holmes's (1999) graduate identity approach in which he regards graduate employability as an identity project, 2) graduate employability from a career management perspective, and 3) Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory which engages with accumulated capitals of a community. Chapter 2 provides a further explication of these and other theoretical approaches to employability. I also explain the overarching conceptual framework in which the study is situated and how the three theories hang together in support of the purpose of the study.

1.5 The research methodology

1.5.1 The aim of the study

As argued above, HE in SA, as elsewhere in the world, faces rapid growth in student numbers, increased pressure from stakeholders (governments, employers, students and parents) to deliver employable graduates as well as a paradoxical rise in graduate un- and underemployment rates. The reaction to the need for employable graduates varies between countries and institutions. In SA the response to prepare graduates for employability is mostly at policy level (cf. 1.3 Higher education and graduate employability). Walker and Fongwa (2016) mention isolated employability interventions at three South African HEIs, but it seems as if a holistic, inclusive incorporation of graduate employability in the South African HE system is still lacking. Graduate employability in SA has been the focus of a few quantitative studies (Altbeker & Storme 2013; British Council 2015; CHEC 2013; Griesel & Parker 2009; Rogan & Reynolds 2009), but limited empirical research based on a sound theoretical foundation exists. What is needed is an understanding of how graduates experience the realities of searching for employment and making the

transition into employment. Do they consider themselves as employable and how do they experience the transition into employment?

This study therefore explores the journeys of graduates into first-time employment. The main research question was: 'What were the experiences of first-time entrants into the labour market during their transition from graduate to employee?' Four sub-questions informed the main research question namely:

1. What strategies did these students employ at university in order to graduate successfully?
2. What strategies did these students employ to secure employment?
3. How is success in the workplace understood by these graduates?
4. How, according to them, do these students' degree studies feed back into their jobs?

1.5.2 The research approach

A research paradigm guides the way a phenomenon is studied and data is interpreted. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) regard this 'way' as a set of beliefs directing the researcher's actions. This set of beliefs includes the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises. For some researchers the choice of a paradigm determines the intent, motivation and expectations of the research. These researchers believe that without nominating a paradigm as the first step of the research process, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature or research design (Mackenzie & Knipe 2006). Plowright (2011), on the other hand, holds that the research question determines the paradigm the researcher adopts. For him, the paradigm follows from the purpose of the research, i.e. the paradigm is determined by what needs to be done or achieved through the research and not the other way around. In my case, I sought to present an analysis of the journeys of graduates into first-time employment to enhance understanding of these complex transitions. I therefore knew that I wanted to 'speak' to graduates; I wanted to 'listen' to their stories to be able to present their experiences. Hence, the purpose of my research informed the research paradigm I followed. 'Speak' and 'listen' steered me to an interpretive paradigm.

The interpretive paradigm is about making sense of human behaviour and describing human experiences (Holloway & Wheeler 2002). Since my aim was to develop insight into the participants' experiences during their transition into first-time employment, and this approach allows for the understanding of human experience through the participants' subjective views of the issue being studied (Mackenzie & Knipe 2006; Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006), I regarded the interpretive paradigm as appropriate for this study.

Epistemology refers to how the reality is captured or how the truth can be found (Burrell & Morgan 1979). Within the interpretive paradigm reality is captured through the interpretation of realities. Hence, knowledge is not fixed but depends on interpretations of experiences. In this study the knowledge that I gained was the interpreted realities of the participants. From an ontological perspective there is no objective reality but rather multiple realities due to varying human experiences (Terre Blanche et al. 2006). The social world is not a given, but rather produced and reinforced through human's actions and interpretations of the world (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Goertz & Mahoney 2012). The graduates' transitions were not a given or identical between participants, but depended on each participant's interpretations of his/her realities.

In an interpretive paradigm both epistemology and ontology are sustained through a methodology which is interactional, inductive and qualitative, as employed in this study. Although I adopted an inductive approach to my research data, I argue that all research will include elements of deductivity. No researcher enters a field of research without any prior knowledge of the field. I therefore claim that the research was conducted mainly inductively, but included aspects of deductivity.

My aim in this study was to allow the participants to relay their experiences during the transition into employment. Their narratives produced a host of rich, in-depth qualitative data which enabled me to describe and interpret their experiences in order to develop an understanding of their transitions into employment. I did not aim for generalisability and prediction, but rather focused on describing, clarifying and interpreting the lived experiences of the participants (Polkinghorne 2005).

1.5.3 The research context

This study builds on a graduate destination survey (GDS), *Pathways from university to work* (CHEC 2013), of the 2010 cohort of graduates from the four universities³ in the Western Cape in SA that was conducted by the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC).⁴ The main purpose of the survey was to reveal the varied pathways into work for the graduates of the four universities. The GDS paints a detailed picture of the Western Cape labour market across all qualification levels and provides valuable data in terms of quality and satisfaction levels, university performance, graduate destinations and employability. The GDS results were reported by adopting the concept of ‘pathways’ as a means to capture the fracturing of traditional transitions from education to work. Seven pathways from university into employment were identified namely:

- a) “Employed graduates who have entered the labour market for the first time in 2010 and have acquired full-time employment (‘young’ graduates);
- b) Employed graduates who were employed prior to studying for the qualification achieved in 2010 (‘mature’ graduates) and who have (in most cases) continued with such employment during their study years;
- c) Self-employed graduates;
- d) Unemployed graduates;
- e) Continuing higher education students who have enrolled for additional programmes since graduation in 2010;
- f) Graduates employed in the informal sector (e.g., street vendors, spaza shops etc.); and
- g) Unemployed graduates not looking for work (e.g., care-givers, homemakers and religious persons)” (CHEC 2013:2).

³ Western Cape is one of the nine provinces in South Africa and has four universities namely the University of Cape Town (UCT), Stellenbosch University (SU), the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). All four universities are public institutions of which CPUT is a university of technology, while the three others are traditional universities. UCT and SU are historically white universities.

⁴ CHEC is a section 21 company representing the four universities whose graduates participated in the research.

My study focuses on the first pathway, namely first-time entrants to the labour market and aims to provide a more detailed description of the complex journeys of first-time entrants into employment.

1.5.4 The participants

Within the context of qualitative research, sample size has been a topic of debate. According to extensive research conducted by Mason (2010), the median sample size for 2 533 qualitative studies was 28 participants. Most qualitative studies do not explain the sample size. In the case of postgraduate studies sample size is often related to faculty regulations rather than qualitative rigour. An appropriate sample size suggested by Marshall (1996) is one that answers the research questions adequately or, according to Mason (2010), when saturation of data is achieved. Therefore, ideally, the sample size should be determined as the study progresses. This requires a flexible research design and an iterative and cyclical approach to sampling, data collection, analysis and interpretation (Marshall 1996). Such an approach is often unpractical, therefore a compromise which is workable but still ensures qualitative rigour is needed.

The sample size of my study is 46 participants. Although data analysis and interpretation occurred in a cyclical and iterative manner, the sample size was pre-determined in order to satisfy the following criteria:

- a) Substantial representation of participants from all four institutions;
- b) Equal representation of male and female participants;
- c) Representation of all race groups;
- d) Representation of general formative as well as professional programmes;
- e) Representation of levels of qualifications; and
- f) Representation of graduates employed in public, private and HE sectors.

An additional criterion that was incorporated was that of being from a disadvantaged background. I purposively selected the sample so that 65 per cent of the sample would represent students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is important since the South African HE landscape has changed over the past 22 years. The

participation of specifically black students has increased to 71 per cent of the total student population in 2014 (CHET 2016). Considering that of the fifty percent of the South African population that live in poverty, 90 percent are black people (Leibbrandt, Wegner & Finn 2011; Index Mundi, 2013) and that the black population has the highest unemployment rate in the country (Statistics South Africa 2012), it can be assumed that a considerable percentage of the black students would be from disadvantaged backgrounds. A correlation between the number of black students in HE and graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds was therefore vital to provide a realistic presentation of graduate experiences during the transition into employment.

‘Disadvantage’ in this case was defined by using students’ means of financial support during their HE studies and their parents’ level of education as proxies. Two survey questions were used to inform these proxies namely:

- a) ‘What means did you use to pay for the registration, tuition and book fees for the qualification you obtained in 2010?’
- b) ‘What was the highest level of education that each of your parents/guardians had completed as on the 1st September 2012?’

Initially, I considered using ‘province residing in at 1st September 2012’ (see survey questions below) as another criterion. It turned out that more than 80 per cent of the potential participants resided in the Western Cape (WC) and Gauteng Province (GP) at that time, which did not make it viable to include all nine provinces (Burnard 2004). Only graduates residing in WC and GP on 1 September 2012 were then added as another criterion. The selected sample size of 46 participants met all the diversity requirements as set out above (see Table 1.1), and fell within the proposed range of sample sizes (Babbie & Mouton 2011) acceptable for a qualitative study.

The sample frame for possible participants emanated from the CHEC GDS of the 2010 cohort of graduates from all four universities in the WC. The cohort included graduates who received certificates and diplomas, undergraduate (3- and 4-year bachelors) and postgraduate qualifications (postgraduate diplomas, honours, master’s and doctorates. The total size of the 2010 cohort was 24 710 graduates and the survey received 5 560 responses – a 22.5 per cent response rate. The aggregate response rates for the four institutions were as follows: CPUT = 21.8%, UCT =

21.9%, SU = 21.6% and UWC = 26.7% (CHEC 2013), which meant that there was almost equal representation of the four institutions in the survey results.

Three questions in the survey were used as proxies to identify first-time entrants into employment:

- a) What was your employment status just before you started studying towards the qualification you obtained in 2010? - This question was used to establish the status of the student before graduating in 2010. The selection provided 3 549 students.
- b) What was your employment status on 1 September 2012? - This question was used to confirm whether these graduates entered the labour market after graduating in 2010. The selection provided 2 644 students.
- c) When did you start the job you had on the 1st of September? - This question was used to confirm that the selected graduates started working after graduation. The selection provided 1 065.

The process resulted in a sample frame of 1 065 graduates from the possible 5 560 of whom 857 resided in the WC and GP on 1st September 2012. Of the 857 potential participants 14.47 per cent resided in GP, and the final selection was done to reflect the ratio of participants residing in the WC and GP.

The 857 participants were listed according to their institutions. Each participant had a unique number which was allocated to him/her during the GDS survey. For each institution I selected possible participants to meet the criteria using their unique numbers as identifiers. I purposively selected participants one by one considering all the pre-determined criteria in order to obtain the most diverse sample possible. In case a selected participant was not available, I selected a substitute participant with a similar profile from the list. The selection process was iterative as I moved between the selected participants and the possible participants until I had the required number of participants. The wide range of criteria required me to select a relatively large sample. Since the selected participants were first-time entrants into employment they were all in the age group of 22 to 30 at the time of the research. Forty-six participants of the potential 857 graduates were thus selected purposively to be representative of the criteria set out above (see Table 1.1) (Polkinghorne 2005;

Terre Blanche et al. 2006). Thirty of the participants were from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Institution		Field of study		Level of qualification		Gender		Race		Sector employed		Residing province	
CPUT	13	AgriSciences	1	PhD	3	Male	20	African	14	HE	7	Western Cape	38
		Arts and Social Sciences	10	Masters	3								
SU	12	Economic and Management Sciences	12	Honours	5			Coloured	19	Private	22		
		Education	1	Postgraduate diploma	2								
UCT	10	Engineering	3	Bachelors	31	Female	26	Indian/ Asian	1	Public	16	Gauteng Province	8
		Law	1	Diploma	1								
UWC	11	Medicine and Health	5	Certificate	1			White	12	Un-employed	1		
		Science	13										

Table 1.1: Summary of selected participants

Table 1.1 presents an analysis of the selected participants according to the pre-determined criteria and gives an indication of the diversity of the selected participants.

An aspect that emerged from the criteria applied in the selection of the participants was that 31 of the participants were first-generation students (FGSs). FGSs are students whose parents have no tertiary education (Heymann & Carolissen 2011). Although not all FGSs are from disadvantaged backgrounds, in SA most FGSs are from disadvantaged backgrounds due to the country's apartheid history. In 1994 the participation rate of black people in HE was only 9 per cent (HESA 2014). Hence, of the 71 per cent black students currently in the HE system, a large majority will be FGS. In this study only one participant who was not selected as being disadvantaged, was a FGS.

1.5.5 Data collection

In qualitative research, the researcher approaches the participant with the aim of finding out about his/her experiences (Holloway & Wheeler 2002). The researcher immerses him/herself into the context of the participant to collect rich, in-depth data (Terre Blanche et al. 2006). Different data collection methods, most commonly

interviews, observations and focus groups, are used to produce qualitative data. More recently the use of photo voice (Steyn 2009), online narratives (Ardoin, DiGiano, O'Connor & Holthuis 2016), participant journals and social media (Lourens 2013), amongst others, have also been used effectively. The important consideration in the choice of a data collection method would be to choose the method that would provide the most insightful data and is feasible at the same time (Burnard 2004).

My aim was to provide an analysis of the transitions into first-time employment of graduates who meet a wide range of criteria (cf. 1.5.4 The participants). I therefore needed a relatively large sample. I further realised that the participants were employed full-time and had specific, busy schedules. It would have been challenging for them if their participation was too time-consuming. It would also be challenging for me if I had to work around more than one participant's schedule to stage a focus group, for example. The method I chose therefore had to be as time effective as possible, and had to enable me to easily arrange an appointment around the participant's schedule, but still have the potential to provide sufficient information while at the same time ensure a high response rate. I therefore opted for semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews involve an interview schedule with pre-determined questions, but the order or wording can be modified, questions can be omitted and/or additional questions can be added (Barriball & While 1994). Apart from the fact that I was well trained in conducting semi-structured interviews, I was aware of specific advantages of the method that the study could benefit from. Firstly, through semi-structured interviews I was able to uncover information which I probably would not have been able to access through observations or questionnaires. The semi-structured interview provided a natural way of interaction with a participant during which mutual understanding could be ensured. I was able to rephrase or simplify questions that were not understood by the participant and I could clarify what the participant meant when I did not understand (Alshenqeeti 2014; Polkinghorne 2005). Secondly, since a semi-structured interview involves an interview schedule, it ensured consistency amongst the 46 interviews (Barriball & While 1994). Thirdly, the interview schedule ensured that I covered all the topics I wanted to collect data on, but simultaneously provided flexibility since it was not as fixed as a structured

interview (Alshenqeeti 2014). I was able to follow the participant's lead during the interview (Leech 2002) and allowed the participant to freely recount his/her experiences. The last two advantages pertain not only to semi-structured interviews, but to personal interviews in general. Fourthly, while it was not easy to arrange appointments with 46 participants, only one participant did not show up for the appointment. The widely acknowledged high response rate of a personal interview made the method particularly appealing (Alshenqeeti 2014). Lastly, the individual interview affords non-verbal indicators such as body language and facial expressions that are useful to evaluate the validity of the participant's answer and the intensity of the experience described (Barriball & While 1994; Denscombe 2014).

Individual interviews, like any research tool, have some drawbacks. Firstly, conducting 46 interviews across two provinces was time-consuming with regard to firstly collecting, and thereafter transcribing and analysing the data (Alshenqeeti 2014). Secondly, Hammersley and Gomm (2008) point out that what people say in an interview is determined by the questions they are asked or what they think the interviewer wants. I therefore needed to be very careful not to ask leading questions or put words in the participant's mouth. Thirdly, related to the previous drawback, this method has the potential of subconscious bias from both the researcher and the participant (Van Teijlingen 2014). Ideally another form of data collection method should thus accompany semi-structured interviews to ensure the credibility of the data. I will return to this in section 1.5.8. Despite potential drawbacks, the advantages of individual, semi-structured interviews as data collection method outweighed the disadvantages, and the interviews produced a host of rich in-depth data.

As mentioned above, an interview schedule (Appendix A) was developed to guide the interviews. The development of the interview schedule is a key phase in the qualitative research process. During my literature review I identified areas of interest and relevance that should be covered in the interview. The broad areas were categorised into more manageable groupings (Barriball & While 1994), and this resulted in four groupings namely 1) HE, 2) securing employment, 3) professional success and 4) HE's relation to work. As the review of literature continued, I added questions to each grouping. The final stage of the interview schedule development

entailed the consolidation of questions per grouping in order to simplify the schedule and to ensure that replications did not occur. I tested the schedule during discussions with graduates and colleagues to ensure that the meanings of the questions were clear.

The semi-structured interviews of approximately forty minutes each were conducted in and around Cape Town and Johannesburg from March to November 2015. Most of the interviews were conducted during office hours at the participants' workplaces, whereas a few were conducted in public places like coffee shops. A few workplaces did not have private spaces to conduct the interviews and communal areas had to be used. Some participants were sensitive not to use worktime for non-work related matters and often the only time available was participants' lunch hours. For participants working shifts, appointments had to be arranged on their off days. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by a transcriber where after I checked the transcriptions for accuracy.

1.5.6 Data analysis

The data collected during interviews are used to uncover the essence of the topic or issue in question, as in my study. Although I had 'hunches' of what to expect, I remained open-minded and analysed the data inductively (Holloway & Wheeler 2002). However, I remained aware that no researcher is free from theoretical and epistemological commitments and data are not analysed in an epistemological vacuum (Braun & Clarke 2006). I would therefore argue as argued under 1.5.2 that inductive analysis often co-exists with a degree of deductivity. In my case, the interview schedule was developed through an extensive literature review which informed the background with which I entered the research.

The data analysis already started at the time when I checked the transcriptions for accuracy. The reading and re-reading of the transcriptions provided me with a bird's eye view of the whole data set and enabled me to search for and identify possible themes. The corrected transcriptions were then coded in Atlas.ti (Rambaree 2007). During the coding process, 150 individual sub themes emerged (Level 1 coding). The sub-themes were categorised according to five pre-determined categories (super families) (see Figure 1.1) namely 1) entry into HE, 2) experience in HE, 3)

transition into employment, 4) negotiating employment and 5) value of HE. The five categories were determined taking into consideration the main research question and the four sub-questions as well as the groupings in the interview schedule. The first four categories represented four phases in the graduate journey; this made possible a chronological approach to the data analysis. In each of the aforementioned categories sub-themes (Level 1 codes) were then grouped into themes (Level 2 coding). A total of 23 themes (families) (see Figure 1.1) in the five categories emerged from the data. Subsequent rounds of analysis of the data were done according to the theoretical frameworks adopted for each of the articles in the thesis (Chapters 3, 4 and 5).

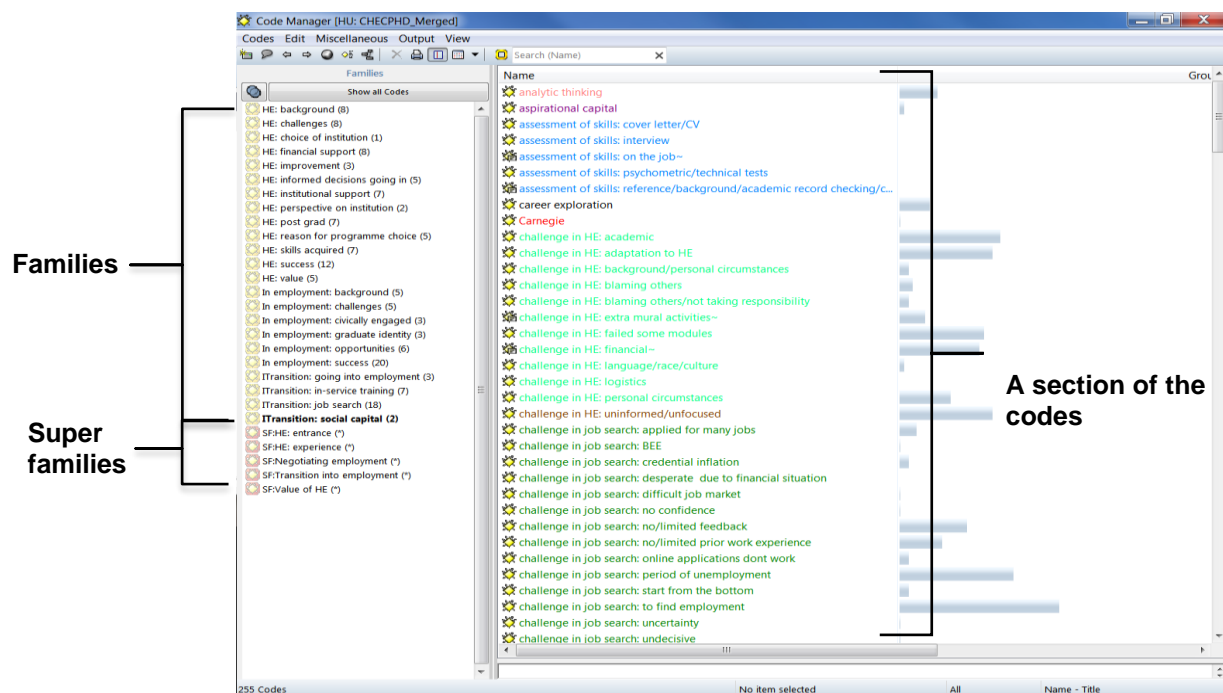


Figure 1.1: Diagrammatic representation of the thematic analysis in Atlas.ti.

1.5.7 Goodness of the study

When justifying qualitative inquiry Peshkin (1993) points out that the focus should be respecting, and not defending, the integrity of the qualitative approach. Such respect derives not from issues and premises as defined by non-qualitative inquiry, but rather from taking qualitative inquiry as the starting point by asking, 'What is its [the study's] generative promise [of the study]?' (Peshkin 1993:23). This study has two main outcomes in terms of qualitative inquiry namely 'describing' and 'interpreting' which arose from a need to understand the graduate transition into first-time

employment. For Peshkin (1993), the proof of the research lies in its outcome. In other words, did I, as the researcher, succeed in describing and interpreting the graduate journeys in a way that enhanced the understanding thereof? To answer this question I apply the concept of goodness to my research.

The concept of goodness is embedded in the dynamic, interactive processes throughout the research and is situated within 1) the epistemology and theory that informs the study, 2) the methodology, 3) the collection of data, 4) the representation of the voices in the study, 5) the interpretation and presentation of the data, and 6) the recommendations emanating from the research (Arminio & Hultgren 2002; Tobin & Begley 2004). During the research the researcher moves back and forth between the design and implementation in order to ensure that goodness is reflected throughout the whole study. Goodness becomes the overarching principle to ensure the quality and scientific rigour of the research (Tobin & Begley 2004). I applied the abovementioned six criteria to this study in the following way to demonstrate the goodness of the research and thus the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study:

1) My approach towards the participants was characterised by empathy. I aimed for an insider perspective with regard to their experiences and allowed them to narrate their experiences. I listened to them and provided a safe space where they could convey their experiences, while being cognisant of my preconceived perceptions. After each interview I deliberately reflected on similarities or exceptions in comparison to previous interviews, literature and my preconceived ideas (Tobin & Begley 2004). My researcher position supported the interpretive paradigm.

2) The methodology suggests the specific route I took upon the broad research map. The methodology supports and is supported by the research paradigm; in this case an interactional, inductive and qualitative methodology (cf. 1.5.2. The research approach).

3) The chosen approach informed the choice of data collection (cf. 1.5.5. Data collection). The semi-structured interviews with the participants produced thick, detailed descriptions about their experiences. Arminio and Hultgren (2002) find goodness in such data.

4) In the representation of the voices in a study, goodness is found when the researcher does not present him/herself as an expert on others' experiences but rather allows the participants' voices to be heard (Arminio & Hultgren 2002). I was cognisant of my researcher position and asked myself the question (Arminio & Hultgren 2002:454), 'How shall I be towards these people I am studying?' I realised that I had to build a participant-researcher relationship which reflected the participants' conviction that I would present a true reflection of their experiences. I started doing this at the point when I phoned them to arrange appointments. I was honest about what the research was about, how long the interview would take and what was expected from them. I continued the relation building process by following up the telephone call with an email confirming the appointment. I respected their time by being on time for every appointment and did not reschedule appointments. This process contributed to the dependability of the research process as all the telephone calls, emails and diarised appointments are documented and traceable.

During the interview, I gave my full attention to the participant and listened to them attentively. I often rephrased what they said to confirm that I understood them correctly.

During the interpretations of the transcriptions I remained cognisant of my researcher bias and subjectivity. To ensure the credibility of my interpretations, I compared my coding of transcriptions to that of my supervisor who also coded several transcriptions. This comparison revealed considerable similarity between our respective codings (Tobin & Begley 2004).

5) The importance of meaning making lies in the art of interpretation and presentation. To fulfil goodness in interpretation and presentation, data analysis should open up text even beyond the participant's own understanding. This type of analysis requires repeated listening and reading of the text and the coding thereof according to themes (Arminio & Hultgren 2002). I repeatedly listened to interviews and each transcript was read at least six times during various phases of the data analysis. In interpreting the data, I attempted not only to report on experiences as told to me but rather construct meanings within the chosen theoretical frameworks to explicate the realities of the participants. Although the data consisted of only of one interview transcript per participant, the relatively large number of transcripts ensured

sufficient recurrence of identified themes. On the other hand, they also gave evidence of the unique experiences of participants.

6) The purpose of social science research is to improve lives. Goodness requires recommendations of how practice can be transformed through the insight gained in a study (Arminio & Hultgren 2002). As indicated in the findings of each article and the conclusion chapter, the recommendations highlight the complexity of the graduate transition and the importance for all stakeholders to take responsibility to support graduates during this journey (cf. 3.7, 4.9, 5.6, 6.8). The aim is that the recommendations would be oriented towards the possibilities for practical action informed by sound research (Tomlinson & Holmes 2016).

Goodness provides a creative and innovative way to judge qualitative research. The research process must demonstrate meaning making through all the elements of the process linked together to offer new understandings and improved practices. The theoretical approach, methodology and data collection supported the generative promise of this research and provided a host of rich and thick data to enhance the understanding of graduate transitions into employment.

1.5.8 Limitations to the research

One of the limitations frequently levelled against qualitative research is researcher bias. In qualitative research where the researcher aims to gain an 'insider perspective', researcher bias is a factor that has to be taken into account and a researcher should be cognisant of his/her position vis-à-vis the research problem and the participants. Researcher bias in this study was curbed through the use of semi-structured interviews which allowed for consistency and sufficient coverage of all relevant topics.

The study provides a broad overview of the journeys of the 46 participants into first-time employment. Rich thematic descriptions of the entire data set are provided in order to highlight the predominant themes in the journeys of the graduates. The only data collection method used in this study was the semi-structured interviews. Ideally, another form of data collection would have supported the credibility of the data and mitigated possible researcher bias that might have influenced the analysis of the data. However, due to the participants' contexts (employed and living across the

Western Cape and Gauteng) the possibility of involving them in further research efforts were limited. The 46 interviews, which are more than normally expected for a small scale qualitative study, did however produce rich data that enabled me to answer my research question and sub-questions.

The one interview per participant did not allow for further in-depth exploration of more details of participants' experiences during their individual journeys (Braun & Clarke 2006). Due to the participants' time constraints follow-up interviews were not possible.

Two of the selection criteria were to select a sample of participants, representative of various levels of qualification as well as fields of study. These criteria resulted in small numbers of participants per level of qualification or field of study. A comparative analysis between the fields of study or levels of qualification was thus not feasible as it could suggest that these responses were interpreted as representative of all graduates with a specific level of qualification or in a specific field of study.

Graduates entering professions consider their internships as their first employment. The transitions into these positions are mostly smooth since internships are arranged for the graduate by the faculty or department concerned or an existing internship contract. Since the focus of the study was on the transition into first-time employment I did not specifically investigate the employment journeys of these graduates after their internships although mention was made of career moves after internships.

1.5.9 My researcher position

My researcher position is shaped by my view on the purpose of HE and I refer to Blessinger's (2015b) point of view as presented in section 1.1 to explain my position. To him the purpose of HE is about developing personal agency through the promotion of freedom and responsibility. He links the development of personal agency to practices that promote quality education and employability. The purpose of HE is clearly not only about acquiring a set of skills or content knowledge. It is about becoming a person with certain qualities and dispositions. My support of Blessinger's (2015b) notion on the purpose of HE stems from my teaching career over the past 16 year in an access programme at Stellenbosch University (SU).

The access programme provides students from disadvantaged communities the opportunity to improve their Grade 12 marks in order to qualify for HE. The students are selected on the bases of being disadvantaged in terms of education and socio-economic circumstances. During the year long programme the students are exposed to an active learning approach in all subjects inclusive of Academic Literacy and Computer Skills. The students further receive physical and emotional support. The focus is on the whole-person development of the student. Although the final outcome of the year is improved marks to enter HE, the focus is on the process which results in such an outcome. The development of the students towards their subsequent academic careers is one of the selling points to funders and thus the sustainability of the programme. Students who were not able to speak up in class or function in a group are able to do so at the end of a year. The students reflect self-confidence and a sense of knowing 'who I am.' Hence, in agreement with Blessinger (2015b), to me HE is about the development of a student during interactions (engagements) in all aspects of student life and the construction of a sense of reality and the meaning of life in order to become a responsible person who can contribute to society. My teaching career shaped my view on the purpose of HE and consequently my perspective on graduate employability. During the analysis of approaches to graduate employability it was therefore natural for me to gravitate towards approaches with processual and developmental elements.

Another factor that influenced my choice of approaches to graduate employability is also related to my teaching experience; more specifically students' levels of engagement with learning. Research (Floyd, Harrington & Santiago 2009) confirmed by my personal experience, shows that one of the factors that determines student engagement is whether an activity, assignment or a module is valuable and as such embedded in the curricula. Add on activities, those that fall outside of a curricula and supposedly do not have value, are not engaged with to the same extent. Any intervention aiming at the promotion of graduate employability should therefore be embedded in curricula and prove to be valuable. Sumanasiri, Yajid and Khatibi (2015) confirm this perspective by emphasising a clear relationship between employability of graduates and the actual learning activities that they engage with in university programmes (also see Luescher-Mamashela 2015). It is with this

perspective of the purpose of HE, particularly concerning teaching and learning, that I approached this study on graduates' perspectives on their own employability.

1.5.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in research are important to safeguard the dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of participants to the study (Stellenbosch University 2016). Since the study was a follow-up of the CHEC GDS, permission was obtained from CHEC to conduct the study as well as to use the survey data. As the participants to the study were alumni from four institutions, ethical clearance and permission to use institutional data were obtained from the four universities in the Western Cape (CPUT, UCT, UWC, SU), (Appendices B, C, D, E, F, G).

The contact details of the participants were obtained from the GDS personal information data base. Participants were then contacted telephonically. I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study, where after the participant had the opportunity to ask questions and indicate whether he/she would be willing to participate in the research. During the process of contacting and arranging appointments with possible participants, I was sensitive to the fact that possible participants could experience being contacted by a complete stranger as intrusive (Babbie & Mouton 2011). I explained that the contact is made on account of his/her participation in the GDS. If the participant indicated that he/she was not interested, I thanked him/her for receiving the call and ended the call. If the participant indicated that he/she was willing to participate in the research, an appointment was scheduled. The telephone call was followed by an email confirming the appointment. A consent letter (Appendix H) was attached to the email informing him/her about his/her rights, inclusive of confidentiality and anonymity.

At the interview, the participant received two hard copies of the consent letter. One was signed for my records and another for the participant's records. Before commencing with the interview, I asked the participant's permission to record the interview. The recordings and transcriptions of interviews were stored in password protected folders. The only people with access to the data were me, my supervisor and the transcriber, all of whom handled the data with a high degree of confidentiality. Anonymity of participants was ensured by using pseudonyms for all

first names in all publications related to the research. In the case of references to institutions or company names, I replaced identifying information with 'institution' and 'company name'.

With the exception of one participant, I was not acquainted with the participants and was not in any relationship with them which may have resulted in a position of power. None of the participants benefited from the research. The one participant with whom I was acquainted was a former student of mine, but I have not had any contact with her since she left the programme where I was involved in ten years ago.

1.6 The structure of the dissertation

This doctoral dissertation is presented as a 'PhD by publication'. The dissertation consists of three wrap-around chapters, the Introduction (Chapter one), an expose of theoretical perspectives (Chapter two) and the Conclusion (Chapter six) and three publishable articles (Chapters three to five). This introductory chapter set the scene for the three articles by providing the background to the study as well as methodological approaches. Chapter two provides an overview of theoretical approaches to graduate employability, the overarching conceptual framework in which the research is situated as well as a motivation for the choice of the three theoretical approaches used in this study.

The PhD by publication differs from the 'traditional' PhD dissertation, in a number of respects. Firstly, there is no separate chapter devoted to the research methodology. A discussion of the research methodology is included in Chapter one, while abridged versions are included in each publishable article as required by the journals concerned. Secondly, in this study I did not utilize a single theoretical framework for my data interpretation, but instead analysed my data using three different theoretical lenses, in order to present deep and varied insights into the phenomenon of graduate employability. Finally, Chapter six serves as the conclusion to the research and draws together the conclusions from the three articles.

To answer the research questions the data were considered from three theoretical approaches and presented as three articles. Each article represents a specific interpretation of the data in order to develop an understanding of the journeys of graduates into first-time employment from a particular conceptual angle, as

explicated in Figure 1.2. Although the conceptual focus of each article differs, unavoidable commonalities and repetitions occur as a result of a single research focus namely, graduates moving into first-time employment.

In reporting the data I anonymised participants by using pseudonyms for all first names. Verbatim quotations were translated from Afrikaans, where applicable, and filler sounds were deleted to enhance readability without changing the meaning. Quotes used in the text were italicised in order to enhance readability. Participant quotations were identified by means of identifiers in brackets after the pseudonym of the participant. Each identifier includes race, gender, degree acquired and whether the participant was a FGS. An example of such an identifier would be: (black, female, LLB, FGS). FGS was not included in Article 3 since the participants in that subset of the data were all FGSs. Degree abbreviations are listed in Appendix I. The notes and reference styles in Chapters 3 to 5 are according to the identified journals' styles. However, different sections in the articles were numbered for ease of reference even though a journal article does not usually include numbering of sections.

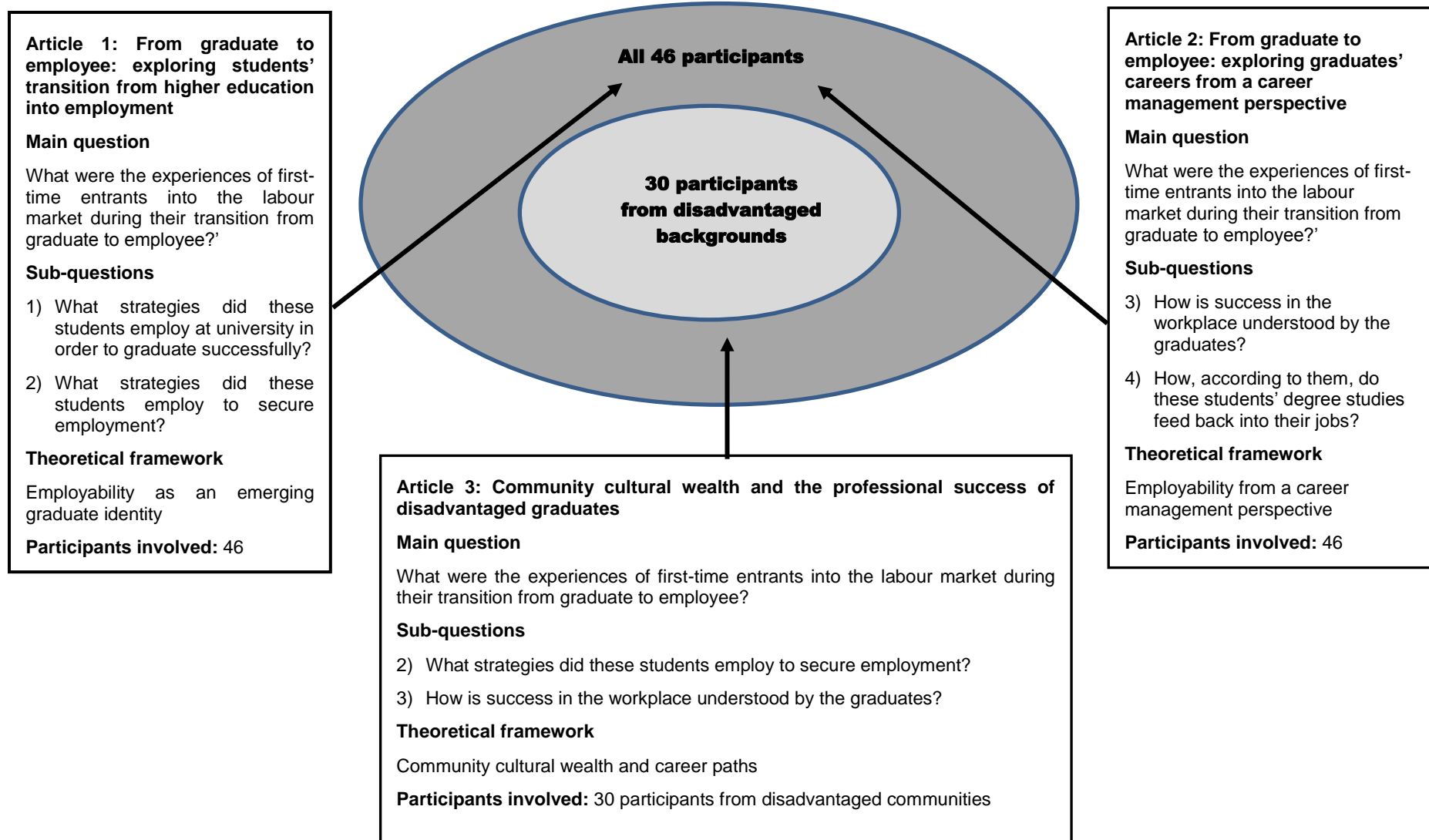


Figure 1.2: Diagrammatic representation of three articles constructing the research

1.6.1 Article 1: From graduate to employee: exploring students' transition from higher education into employment

The focus of the first article is the transition of graduates into first-time employment from a graduate identity perspective. I considered two sub-questions in this part of the study namely:

- 1) What strategies did these students employ at university in order to graduate successfully?
- 2) What strategies did these students employ to secure employment?

An interview schedule with probing questions guided the interview and enabled me to collect appropriate data to answer the above-mentioned sub-questions (Appendix B, sections A and B). The data were analysed in two stages. The first stage of the data analysis, a thematic analysis, allowed me to consider the identity formation of the participants during four phases in the journey into employment namely 1) entry into HE, 2) experiences during HE, 3) transition into employment, and 4) negotiating employment. In the second stage of the data analysis, I mapped a trajectory of emerging identity for each graduate in terms of the claim-affirmation model of modalities of emergent identity (Holmes 2015). The emerging identity perspective allowed me to develop an understanding of how each graduate negotiated their journey from the point where they decided which programme to study up to their first employment.

1.6.2 Article 2: From graduate to employee: exploring graduates' careers from a career management perspective

In the second article, I focus on the transition into employment from a career management perspective. The following two sub-questions inform this part of the study:

- 1) How is success in the workplace understood by these graduates?
- 2) How, according to these students, do their degree studies feed back into their jobs?

Similar to article one, I used probing questions (Appendix B, sections C and D) to gain in-depth data on the participants' perspectives of their own success and the value of HE with regard to their career success. The career management perspective enabled me to develop an understanding of how and when the participants initiated thoughts about future careers, how they set goals and engaged in strategies towards a successful career and how they used feedback to guide these processes. In addition to the career management approach, I employed Skovsmose's (2005) notion of a person's foreground to explicate participants' interpretations of their career success further. Central to this article are the participants' perspectives on the value of HE towards their careers.

The combination of the data analyses from a graduate identity perspective (Article 1) and a career management perspective (Article 2) enabled me to present an interpretation of the experiences of the participants during their transitions from graduate to employee. By considering the four sub-questions in Articles one and two, I was able to construct detailed pictures of the participants' experiences.

1.6.3 Article 3: Community cultural wealth and the professional success of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds

Inequality in primary and secondary schooling outcomes is still evident in the education system in post-apartheid SA and carries over into tertiary education where choices are limited by schooling background and socio-economic status (Rogan & Reynolds 2015). Although many of these graduates do not graduate successfully, there are those who do and move into employment. Within the South African context (cf. 1.5.4. The participants) it is thus important to gain an understanding of how these graduates engage with HE, move into employment and negotiate a successful career. The aim of the third article is to explore the experiences of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds and the factors that contribute to the success in employment of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Job appointments, globally as in SA, are often made on the basis of acceptability rather than capability (Brown & Scase 1994), so social position still has a significant influence on employment. This begs the question: if social position negatively affects employment opportunities, how do graduates from disadvantaged communities

counter this? Yosso's community cultural wealth theory explains how marginalised groups use their capitals, and provides a useful lens to understand how graduates make the transition into employment by engaging with their capitals. Although Yosso's theory would normally be situated within a critical approach, it has often been used effectively within an interpretive approach to describe and understand experiences (Jayakumar, Vue & Allen 2013; Norodien-Fataar 2016; O'Shea 2015; Pérez Huber 2009), rather than for purposes of emancipation. That said, describing and understanding the experiences of students from disadvantaged communities might contribute to their 'emancipation' in making the graduate transition. This may therefore provide for both approaches employed in Article 3 as both the critical and interpretive approaches should demonstrate the epistemology of social construction of discourse (Mishler 2006). This article builds on the work of Jayakumar, Vue and Allen (2013), Kapp, Badenhorst, Bangeni, Craig, Janse van Rensburg, Le Roux, Prince, Pym and Van Pletzen (2014), Norodien-Fataar (2016), Marshall and Case (2010), O'Shea (2015) and Pérez Huber (2009) on how students from disadvantaged communities use their community cultural wealth (CCW) in order to succeed in school, access HE and graduate successfully. In article three, I show that the thirty participants similarly employ their CCW, as explicated by Yosso (2005), to negotiate successful careers.

The perspectives gained from Article three contribute to the detailed picture, developed by Articles one and two, by highlighting how graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds succeed in establishing careers despite what could be considered as 'deficient backgrounds'. The findings from this article should be of particular interest to HE in SA since much effort is put into providing access with success to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, but little is done to support them in the transition into employment.

1.7 In conclusion

This chapter introduced the research namely the exploration of the journeys of first-time graduate entrants into the labour market. I highlighted that little empirical research exists on this important transition in the life stage of graduates. I aim to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by investigating such transitions from three different theoretical perspectives. Following the introduction, I contextualised

the research by describing the changed labour market profile in which graduates have to function as well as the response of HE globally to the human capital needs of the labour market. I highlighted the complexity of the concept of graduate employability and that various theoretical approaches exist of which the skills approach is dominant. I briefly introduced the three theoretical approaches I used as lenses for the interpretation of the data. An in-depth review of approaches to graduate employability follows in Chapter 2.

The next section introduced the research methodology. I explicated the aim of the research through the research questions and thereafter introduced the research approach and context. I then discussed the selection of participants to the study, the data collection in the form of semi-structured interviews and the preliminary data analysis. Further in-depth analysis is presented in each article. The credibility and dependability of the research is addressed by applying the notion of 'goodness' of a study to this work. I conclude the section on the research process by expounding the limitations to the study, my researcher position as well as ethical considerations. Finally, I introduced the three articles constructing the research. I presented this diagrammatically as well as with a short description of each article and showed how the three articles form a coherent whole that answers the research questions.

Following the introductory chapter, I present an analysis of approaches to graduate employability in Chapter 2. The three articles as publishable units follow in Chapters 3 to 5. In the concluding chapter, I draw together understandings and interpretations from the three articles and highlight the unique contribution of each article and of the research as a whole.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical perspectives on graduate employability

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter one the case was made for this study into the experiences of graduates during their transition into first-time employment, or graduate employability. I pointed out that the issue of graduate employability fundamentally relates to the role and purpose of higher education in a context characterized by high levels of youth unemployment and critical skills shortages. These relate to, amongst other things, the massification of higher education, the rise of the knowledge economy and unpredictable labour markets. HE globally is therefore grappling with the meaning of graduate employability and how best to prepare graduates for employment (Dacre Pool & Qualter 2013; Kandiko 2013).

Literature on this issue reveals a shift from the notion of preparing graduates for employment to the concept of 'graduate employability' (Botha 2015; Griesel & Parker 2009; Harvey 2001). This, however, complicates matters even more, since this literature further reveals a lack of common understanding of the concept. Amongst others, the concept of graduate employability is related to 'graduateness' (Holmes 2013a; Jackson 2014; Yorke 2004), 'graduate skills' (Behle & Atfield 2013; Hager et al. 2002), 'graduate attributes' (Liston 1998; Hughes & Barrie 2010; Griesel & Parker 2009), 'graduate identity' (Dunne & Bosch 2015; Holmes 2005; Jackson 2014, 2016) and 'graduate employment rates' (Harvey 2001).

Harvey (2001) makes an interesting distinction between employability processes and employability outcomes. Whereas employability processes include the actions taken by graduates to gain and retain appropriate employment, employability outcomes, or 'graduate employment rates', refer to the proportion of graduates who achieve a full-time job within a specified period. The latter is seen as an institutional achievement rather than the propensity of the student to obtain a job (Harvey 2001). Although it is useful to make a clear distinction between the concepts of graduate employability as a process and graduate employability as employment outcomes, we should keep in mind that the two concepts are related since the one influences the other. Tomlinson

and Holmes (2016) point out that graduate employability is a relational concept referring to factors that are related to actual or anticipated employment outcomes. In this study the term ‘employability’ or ‘graduate employability’ is used to mean the process of graduates’ seeking and gaining employment and the array of factors affecting this process.

2.2 Conceptualizing graduate employability

Several theoretical approaches to employability exist, all attempting to unravel the complex concept of employability. Holmes (2013a) has categorised employability as either a possession (skills), a position or a process. In an analysis of theoretical approaches to employability it became clear that most approaches incorporate one or more of Holmes’s categories. This points to an overlap amongst the approaches and also how approaches have evolved over time. I will make this clear in the following analysis in which I present a critical analysis of eight theoretical approaches to graduate employability which are frequented in literature. After a brief introduction to each approach, I highlight how that approach incorporates one or more of Holmes’s categories and point out strengths and limitations to the approach. I conclude this chapter by expounding, against the overarching conceptual framework, my choice of the three theoretical lenses employed in the three articles.

2.2.1 The skills approach

The skills approach, which is considered the dominant approach in literature, was the earliest theoretical approach to employability and is based on the assumption that employability is defined in terms of certain characteristics of graduates. In this approach the focus is mainly on employers’ expectations of the skills required by graduates for them to be successful in the graduate labour market (Cashian, Clarke & Richardson 2015). From this perspective graduate employability is seen as attributes and/or achievements by graduates, often referred to as ‘soft skills’ or ‘generic skills’, that make them employable. In one of the earliest models, Cotton (1993) has identified a collection of basic, higher order and effective employability skills required by employers, and collated these in his employability skills model. A frequented definition in this approach is that of Yorke (2004:8) who defines graduate employability as ‘a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal

attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.’ Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell and Watts (2000) provide a different view by defining graduate employability from a HE perspective. They define graduate attributes as the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution. These attributes include content and technical knowledge as well as generic skills preparing graduates to act as agents of social good (Barrie 2006).

I contend that the skills or possession approach (Holmes 2013a), remains dominant since it is relatively easy to acquire a list of required skills from employers (or the university community) and equate such a list to graduate employability. In that sense, the strength of this approach lies in the practical possibility of creating such a list. However, the ‘list’ approach has been criticized in a number of respects.

Firstly, as alluded to above, little clarity exists on similarities and differences between notions of graduate ‘skills’, ‘competencies’ and ‘attributes’, and these terms are often used inter-changeably, revealing an absence of a common understanding of these concepts amongst employers, university teachers and graduates themselves (Barrie 2005, 2006; Bennett, Dunne & Carré 1999; Yorke & Knight 2004; Tomlinson 2012). In addition, Barrie (2005, 2006) argues that few of the lists of necessary or desirable skills have a sound theoretical or conceptual basis, resulting from practical consideration and untested perceptions rather than rigorous analytical work.

Secondly, academic communities do not necessarily regard graduate attributes as the core outcomes of their teaching activities, and they have little confidence in the usefulness of such lists to guide their activities (Barrie 2006; Bridgstock 2009; Holmes 2013a).

Thirdly, it is argued that the acquisition of ‘skills’ as part of the formal university curriculum is not a realistic representation of what graduates actually acquire, or what is really expected of graduates. Some scholars argue that debates on skills and attributes may be better located within a context of career development than in the university curriculum (Bridgstock 2009; Tomlinson 2012).

A fourth point of criticism raised by Holmes (2013a) is that these lists of skills or graduate attributes as requirements for employability do not explain graduate outcomes. The skills approach does not explain, for example, the differences between the graduate outcomes of different demographic groups.

Despite the fact that only a few studies have attempted to demonstrate that well-developed skills or attributes do in fact lead to enhanced employability (Bridgstock 2009), the approach remains dominant.

2.2.2 Employability as the ability to be employed

Hillage and Pollard's (1999) approach to employability is regarded as pioneering as it takes a much broader and more nuanced view of employability than the skills approach, and highlights three abilities, namely gaining initial employment, maintaining employment and obtaining new employment if required. Employability is seen as the graduate's capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market in order to realise individual potential through sustainable employment. A graduate's employability depends on his/her knowledge, skills and attitudes and how these assets are applied and presented to employers within the context of personal circumstances and the labour market environment.

Four elements of a graduate's employability are identified. Firstly, graduates need employability assets, which comprise knowledge, skills and attitudes. Secondly, graduates must have the ability to deploy career management skills, and thirdly, they have to acquire job search skills and be able to present themselves to potential employers. The fourth element relates to the ability to realise the above-mentioned assets into employment within the context of personal circumstance and external factors. Although Hillage and Pollard's (1999) approach includes lists of skills or capabilities they do recognise that employability is not a fixed entity, but depends on the interaction between a person's life cycle and the employment context; in this sense it incorporates a processual element.

Although Hillage and Pollard's (1999) contribution takes the debate beyond the rather narrow skills approach, Brown and others (2003) criticize their approach as ignoring the fact that employability is primarily, in their view, determined by the labour market rather than the capabilities of the graduate. Thus, Hillage and Pollard's

(1999) approach represents an example of ‘blame the victim.’ Sumanasiri and others (2015) contend that Hillage and Pollard’s approach does not explain how factors related to employability actually enhance employability. The fourth element in Hillage and Pollard’s (1999) approach refers to the process of activating employability assets in order to secure employment. I argue, in agreement with Sumanasiri and others (2015), that it is this activation element, concerning a developmental aspect of graduate employability that is not clearly explicated.

2.2.3 The duality of employability

In response to their criticism of Hillage and Pollard’s approach to employability, Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2003) advance the notion of the duality of employability, according to which employability has two dimensions, namely the absolute and the relative. The absolute dimension relates to the production of ‘viable human beings.’ This is reflected in the increasing importance of knowledge, skills and commitment of employees for efficiency, innovation and productivity. The relative dimension indicates that employability depends on the laws of supply and demand in the job market. This duality implies that employability not only depends on the graduate’s set of skills meeting the requirements of the job, but also on how he/she stands relative to others competing for the job. Considering both the relative and absolute aspects of employability, Brown and others (2003) define employability as the relative chances a graduate has of acquiring and maintaining different kinds of employment.

Although this approach relates to the skills approach with its focus on the skills needed to be ‘viable’ or employable (the absolute dimension), it extends the notion of graduate employability by incorporating external factors that determine whether a graduate would find a job (the relative dimension). In this regard, Brown and others (2003) ask the question, ‘employable for what?’ The implication for graduates would thus be to explore specific employability opportunities rather than focusing on being employable in a general sense of the word. On a practical level, this approach will imply, similar to the skills approach, a focus on acquiring certain skills during HE. This overreliance on skills is in my view the main weakness of this approach. Conversely I argue that the additional focus of ‘employable for what’ is a strong point of this approach as it relates the absolute dimension of viable human beings to the

relative dimension of employability opportunities, and so broadens and deepens our understanding of graduate employability.

2.2.4 The USEM model of employability

USEM is an acronym for four inter-related components of employability namely 1) understanding, 2) skills, 3) efficacy belief, and 4) metacognition. Yorke and Knight (2004) developed the USEM model in an attempt to provide a more scientific basis for conceptualising employability. Understanding refers to having in-depth knowledge of content and is seen as a key outcome of HE. The 'skills' component refers to an awareness of or responsiveness to a specific context rather than merely a list of key skills. Efficacy belief relates to self-theories reflecting dispositions towards tasks and development. The USEM model highlights the value of malleable self-theories accompanied by a disposition of seeing tasks as opportunities for learning rather than performance measurements. Metacognition consists of elements of 'learning how to learn', of reflection in, on and for practice and a capacity for self-regulation. The model encourages reflection on the way curricula include assessment opportunities that develop the student's efficacy and metacognition, and how self-efficacy and metacognition contribute to the graduate's ability to transfer content knowledge into practical application. The four inter-related components of the model bring together aspects of learning and dispositions, and incorporate skills and processes involved in reflection and self-regulation in order to become an employable graduate.

The strong scientific base of the USEM model embedded in the relation between skills, subject understanding, meta-cognition and personal qualities, has signified the model as a major development in employability research (Dacre Pool & Sewell 2007; Sumanasiri et al. 2015). It is, however, the strength of the model that could at the same time be regarded as its weak point. The model is largely theoretical and still lacks supporting research evidence. Furthermore, due to its complexity, its practical use is limited (Dacre Pool & Sewell 2007). Hinchcliffe and Jolly (2011) point out that the focus of the USEM model is the contribution of a degree programme to employability. In my view, the concept of employability extends far beyond the degree programme and even beyond HE, (cf. 2.3 The overarching conceptual framework) and this focus limits the value of this approach to employability.

2.2.5 The CareerEDGE model

Dacre Pool and Sewell's (2007) key to employability model, also known as the CareerEDGE model, combines all the components of the USEM model and employability skills while simultaneously presenting the factors shaping employability in a practical way. The model is based on the following definition of employability:

Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that makes a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful (Dacre Pool & Sewell 2007:280).

According to the model, providing opportunities to students to develop and acquire degree subject knowledge, generic skills, emotional intelligence, career development learning, and work experience, and students being able to reflect on and evaluate these experiences, will result in the development of higher levels of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem, which are crucial for employability. The integration of these skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes contributes to the employability of the graduate and enables him/her to reflect on and evaluate employment options. Although the model seems simplistic it draws together the essential elements that underpin a deeper understanding of the concept of employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell 2007).

The main strength, in my view, of the CareerEDGE model is the development of an Employability Development Profile (EDP) tool based on the model. The EDP tool is a self-report diagnostic tool which allows students to rate themselves on different aspects of employability as defined by the model. This development is valuable as it enables quantitative assessment of graduates' perceptions of their employability, and as a result the generalisation of findings (Dacre Pool et al. 2014; Sumanasiri et al. 2015). Criticism brought against the CareerEDGE model relates to the growing of the concept of employability by accretion with the addition of new sub-constructs. Furthermore, Smith, Ferns and Russel (2014) describe the CareerEDGE model as a 'snap-shot' view of employability at a certain time. Although the incorporation of both skills and process elements in the CareerEDGE model is one of its strengths, I would argue that it is not clear whether the processual elements are iterative and how such

processes should play out. Also, the application of this model outside of the EDP tool would be difficult due to the proliferation of concepts.

2.2.6 Employability as an emerging graduate identity

Focusing on graduate identity, Holmes (2013a) considers employability as the always temporary relationship that arises between an individual graduate and the field of employment opportunities, as the graduate engages with those who are the 'gatekeepers' to those opportunities, particularly those who make selection decisions. The graduate is involved in a continuing process of self-identification during which significant others ascribe attributes to him/her (Holmes 2001). Skills and attributes, which are not limited to a specific list, are developed through the process of self-identification and are employed in the engagement of the graduate with potential employers (Holmes 2013a). Whereas in the skills approach an improvement in employability would imply the development of appropriate and additional skills, the graduate identity approach is based on the development (thus a process) of the identity of the graduate in such a way that he/she is able to present him/herself to a possible employer, and stands a good chance of being employed (Holmes 2015).

The strength of the graduate identity approach lies in its developmental nature. Students do not become employable through the passive acquisition of skills, but rather by actively developing their own distinct graduate identity (Cashian et al. 2015). The focus in this approach is student-centric; it is about providing a graduate experience which enables the student to develop his/her graduate identity. On a more cautious note, Tomlinson (2012) points to the link between graduate identity and other forms of identities related to social background, gender and ethnicity. For example, when students from disadvantaged backgrounds study in HE contexts where they experience alienation and marginalisation, their graduate identities are negatively shaped by their university experiences and this identity eventually feeds into their presentation of themselves in the labour market.

2.2.7 Employability as a process of career management

From a career management perspective employability is seen as the ability to proactively navigate the working world and successfully manage the career building process, based on attributes such as lifelong learning and adaptability (Bridgstock

2009). Career management is an ongoing process of navigating the continuously changing world of work by exploring careers, setting goals, developing career strategies and adapting when necessary (Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk 2010). In this approach, an employable graduate is one who is able to compete effectively in the job market and is able to move between occupations when necessary, and factors such as fluctuations in the labour market, personal characteristics, and disciplinary differences are taken into account during the process of managing one's career (Bridgstock 2009; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios 2015).

The value of the career management approach lies in its focus on the dependency of employability on the organisational context, thus exploration of career contexts, as well as individual responsibility. Tomlinson and Holmes (2016) indicate that it is imperative that theoretical understandings should take account of the extent to which employment outcomes are significantly determined by factors outside of the control of students and HEIs, yet are to some degree amenable to action taken by students and by HEIs. The career management approach to graduate employability succeeds in doing so through the incorporation of personal agency as well as external factors, such as labour market conditions. In addition, career management skills are incorporated in a processual fashion contributing to the development of the graduate's employability. Bridgstock (2009) further highlights the value of career management skills in the context of diminishing job security, and continual task and role change in the labour market. Graduates would benefit from being able to negotiate such difficult labour market contexts. Employability based on having career management skills would not guarantee employment, but would increase chances of obtaining suitable employment (Sumanasiri et al. 2015).

An additional advantage of the career management approach is the relative simplicity of the terms and concepts involved. The career management concepts and processes could easily be transferred to different contexts in order to simulate the real world to students. This may support graduates in improving the quality of their applications, and as a result their employability, as they would be informed of how to explore possible career opportunities and how to present themselves in the relevant context.

A limitation of the career management process approach is related to the socio-economic circumstances of graduates. For graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, HE is essentially a survival game with the only aim being to acquire a degree (Badenhorst & Kapp 2013). Such graduates may find it difficult to be able to engage in career management processes during their struggle for survival in HE. In this regard, I found the notion of 'foreground' useful in 'minding the gap' in the career management approach.

Skovsmose (2005) originally developed the notion of 'foreground' from a philosophical perspective and used it in the interpretation of learning processes taking place in Danish classrooms. According to him a foreground is formed through the possibilities, tendencies, propensities, obstructions, barriers, hindrances, et cetera, which a person's context provides for him or her. At the same time, a foreground is formed through the person's interpretations of these possibilities, tendencies, propensities, obstructions, barriers, hindrances. Skovsmose (2012) describes a foreground as a fragmented, partial, and inconsistent constellation of bits and pieces of aspirations, hopes, and frustrations. Since interpretations of foregrounds are individual and idiosyncratic, foregrounds are multiple, but at the same time they are collective and established through processes of communication.

The notion of foreground proved relevant for more than what Skovsmose (2005) originally developed it. He indicated the usefulness of the concept in other, different, educational contexts namely, as an example, in a project conceptualising and establishing a mathematics education with an explicit concern for democracy. The relevance of the concept is evident in any discussion of learning that includes a discussion of learning obstacles. In this regard the notion of foreground is useful to explicate the interpretation of graduates' foregrounds, particularly in terms of their interpretation of barriers and hindrances on their graduate journeys. This will be expounded in more detail in Chapter four (Article 2).

2.2.8 Employability as a social position

This theoretical approach represents what Holmes (2013a) categorises as a positional approach. Drawing from Bourdieu's (2006) work the argument is that a dominant class in society monopolises 'cultural capital', a form of wealth stemming

from control over knowledge, ideas, and symbols, which is mainly acquired through the family. Education systems seem to privilege the language, values and practices of the dominant class (Holmes 2013a), therefore graduates from the dominant class have high levels of ‘cultural capital’ which shapes the acquisition of ‘personal capital’ such as credentials (Brown 2000). In this approach a graduate’s employability is connected to his/her social position (Lin & Dumin 1986; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios 2015). Despite the widening of access to HE, access to the best employment opportunities is still easier for those from privileged backgrounds, since employers appoint employees based not only on ‘capability’ but also on ‘acceptability’ (Brown & Scase 1994; Holmes 2013a). Employability as a social position entails processes of acquiring cultural capital as well as the attainment of skills related to cultural capital (cf. 5.2 Cultural capital and community cultural wealth).

The value of viewing employability from a positional approach is embedded in the possibility of explaining differences in graduate outcomes between different demographic groups and as such intercepts this limitation in the skills approach. However, Holmes (2013:548) points to this approach as one that might be called ‘a counsel of despair’ since if employment is related to one’s stance in society, graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds have little hope of acquiring relatively good employment. Yosso’s (2005) CCW theory provides an alternative to the counsel of despair. Although Yosso’s theory has not primarily been developed as an approach to employability, but rather to show how marginalised groups engage with various forms of capital in the struggle for social and racial justice, the theory is useful to understand how graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds use their capitals to make the transition into first-time employment (cf. Chapter 5). Yosso’s theory, with its roots in critical race theory, is a useful lens to explicate how graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, who seem destined for relatively weaker employment opportunities, ‘buck the trend’ (Tomlinson & Holmes 2016) by activating their agencies in the engagement with capitals during the transition into employment.

2.2.9 Concluding remarks

The above analysis of approaches to employability is not exhaustive, but highlights some of the most important views to employability. It is clear that the approaches or

models overlap to a certain extent and that the development of new or alternative approaches attempted to ameliorate limitations in earlier approaches. Holmes (2013a) considers the development of approaches to employability as progressing from the possession approach and a slightly broader approach of social positioning to a processual approach which he considers conceptually and theoretically robust. I agree that the processual approaches to graduate employability have the most potential in illuminating theory based findings in support of actions towards the development of graduate employability. This view supports my overarching conceptual framework as well as three chosen theoretical lenses.

2.3 An overarching conceptual framework

Employability is more than preparing students for work performance upon gaining employment. It is rather concerned with preparing students for a work-life extending from thirty to forty years during which they could live satisfying lives (Tomlinson & Holmes 2016). Graduate employability is about the development of graduates who are able to seek and gain employment, who are able to take account of external factors, and who are able to respond to those factors in ways that would benefit them most. This would imply that graduates need to have self-confidence, self-esteem, content knowledge, but also knowledge about the employment context they are interested in. Graduates would need to be able to learn and adapt continuously as their contexts and circumstances change. I therefore argue for an overarching conceptual framework with a focus on a process of developing such graduates. This study is situated within this overarching conceptual framework which allows for the active involvement of graduates in their own development of employability with the support of other stakeholders (parents, employers, HE). This highlights the importance of personal agency in the concept of graduate employability. My focus in choosing theoretical approaches was therefore on aspects in each theory that would enable graduates employability development in such a way that they may become graduates capable of living satisfying lives.

In the introduction to the three articles in Chapter 1 I referred to the three theoretical approaches selected for this study namely 1) Holmes's (1999) graduate identity approach, 2) the career management approach to employability and 3) Yosso's CCW theory. Key concepts with regard to the overarching conceptual framework in

the theoretical approach employed in Article 1, Holmes's (2013a) graduate identity approach (cf. 3.3.2), are 'relationship', 'engage', 'continuing' and 'process.' These concepts point to the developmental and processual nature of this theory. In this approach, employability is related to a graduate identity which is considered an emergent outcome of social construction and negotiation as a result of interactions with others. Through the development of a graduate identity, the graduate develops self-confidence and self-esteem, amongst other things; as well as an awareness of the importance of continuous identity development and lifelong learning.

In the career management approach to employability (cf. 4.3.2), as employed in Article 2, the key concepts in relation to the overarching conceptual framework are 'process', 'engaging', 'reflective', 'evaluative' and 'lifelong'. Career management entails continuous processes of developing oneself in order to negotiate one's career through social interaction and the construction of strategies and goals. These processes will enable graduates to acquire self-knowledge as well as knowledge about the context they want to work in and whether they will in fact find 'satisfying lives' in that context. In addition, I employ Skovsmose's (2005) notion of foreground to expound the graduates' interpretation of possibilities and challenges in their foregrounds which speak to the negotiation of external factors affecting the graduates. The notion of foreground integrates well with the career management approach as both approaches focus on the process element of the development of graduate employability. In addition, both perspectives incorporate temporal elements; the graduates' interpretations of foregrounds shift over time similar to how their career management processes do.

Yosso's (2005) CCW theory (cf.5.2), as used in Article 3, allows for active engagement with capitals that were and still are accumulated through individuals' lives. Although Yosso refers to these capitals as knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts, the focus is not on what the graduates have, but rather on how they use and interact with their capitals. Yosso points to these capitals as dynamic processes that build on one another. Thus, once more, this theory allows for development during the process of engaging with various capitals and fits well within the overarching conceptual framework.

The chosen theoretical frameworks support the concept of employability from a developmental and processual perspective. All three theories include iterative processes of development as there is continuous movement between the elements in each theoretical approach. Aspects of skills are involved, but are not the focus. Skills are embedded in the developmental processes which enable the graduate to function in the world of work. Figure 2.1 below provides a diagrammatic representation of the three approaches to employability within the overarching conceptual framework of this study.

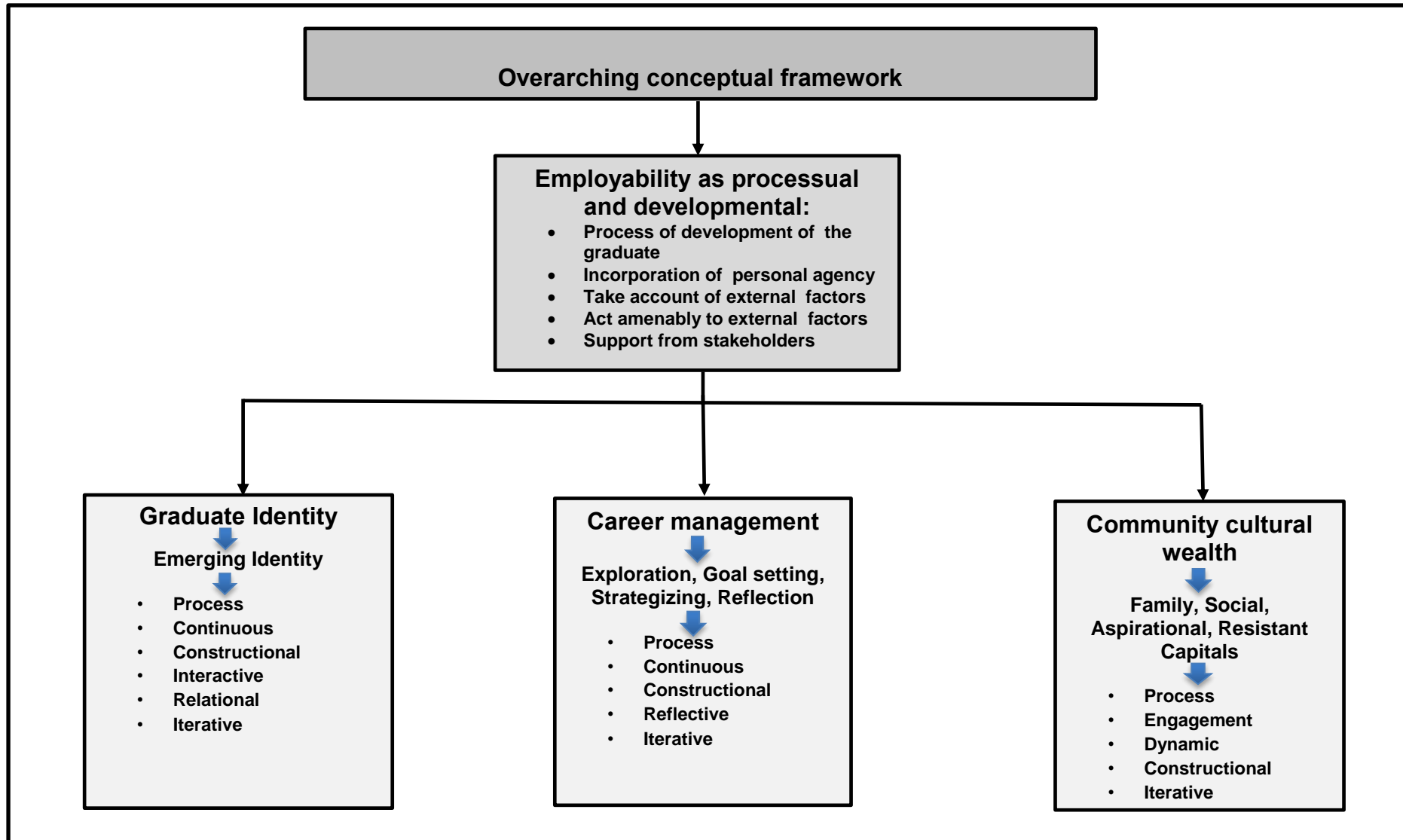


Figure 2.1: Diagrammatic representation of the three theoretic approaches within the overarching conceptual framework

In conclusion, this empirical investigation is conducted within a framework in which graduate employability is viewed as the developmental process of a graduate in order to become a person who is able to seek and gain employment, and successfully negotiate a career within the contextual parameters he/she functions in at the time. Three theoretical lenses will be employed to illuminate different dimensions of the graduate's transition into first-time employment in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER 3

Article 1: From graduate to employee: exploring students' transition from higher education into employment

Abstract: Against the backdrop of increasing pressure on higher education to produce employable graduates, this study explores the transition of graduates into first-time employment by viewing graduate employability from an emerging identity perspective. From this perspective achieving employability is a process of developing an identity of an employable person. The journeys into employment of 46 alumni who graduated in 2010 from four universities in South Africa were investigated in order to develop a better understanding of the transition from graduate to employee. Interview data were analysed by means of thematic analysis, and served as the foundation for the development of a trajectory of emerging identity for each graduate. These trajectories signified mostly complex journeys requiring careful negotiation of career paths. The participants needed a graduate identity with, amongst other things, strong self-esteem and confidence, an appreciation of self-improvement and lifelong learning to negotiate their complex journeys. This study emphasises the important role of higher education to promote graduate employability through the development of a graduate identity without ignoring the importance of the agency of the graduate.

Keywords: employability; graduate attributes; graduate identity; identity trajectories

3.1 Introduction

This paper responds to the question, 'What are the experiences of first-time entrants to the labour market during their transition from graduate to employee?' Our argument is framed within a context where higher education (HE) is increasingly linked with the needs of national economies and is experiencing pressure to produce employable graduates. The assumption that high-level skills are indispensable in a knowledge-based economy has led governments and other stakeholders to focus on the employability of graduates. In addition, students, as well as their parents, expect

a return on their investment by them being able to secure appropriate employment after graduation. The expectation of return on investment is fuelled by statements by academics, amongst others, stating, 'Almost all South Africans who complete an undergraduate degree are guaranteed employment and high lifetime earnings' (Hull 2016). What is the reality experienced by graduates in the South African labour market?

Various conceptual approaches to graduate employability exist, highlighting the complexity of the concept. One perspective, supported by many researchers as the dominant approach, defines graduate employability in terms of certain characteristics of graduates. From this perspective graduates need to acquire a set of skills, understandings and personal attributes that would make them more likely to gain employment and be successful in their careers (Yorke 2004).

From another perspective – the one we take in this paper – graduate employability is viewed as an identity project. According to this interpretation, employability is the result of the process of becoming a graduate who is worthy of employment. Such a graduate has been awarded a degree, but also acts in ways that lead others to assign to him/her 'the identity of person worthy of being employed' (Holmes 2013, 549). Identity is not a fixed entity but rather an emergent outcome of social construction and negotiation. Skills and attributes are elements of the graduate's identity and assist the graduate to maintain the identity that he/she claims to have (Holmes 2013).

Our perspective of graduate employability is explicated by reporting on an empirical research project amongst 46 alumni who graduated in 2010 from four universities¹ in South Africa. The study adopted an interpretive qualitative approach, with the aim of providing detailed descriptions of the journeys of these graduates into first-time employment in order to gain a better understanding of this complex transition.

First, this paper provides a contextual background on the changing HE scene and the forces playing in on HE. This is done with reference to the debate about the purpose of HE. Second, it problematizes graduate employability as a set of skills and motivates why this is not the preferred approach in this study. The paper then constructs an alternative theoretical framework for employability from a graduate

identity perspective and shows how this approach fits within our view of the purpose of HE. Third, we present the findings from our empirical research in the form of themes that emerged from the participants' narratives as well as graduate trajectories which are developed in the context of the graduate identity framework. Finally, a discussion of the findings is offered within the context of the theoretical framework.

The transition from graduate to employee is regarded as a complex process (Tomlinson 2012). We consider whether the exploration of these journeys from an emerging identity perspective could support the notion that becoming a graduate is not simply obtaining a degree but rather a holistic process of developing a graduate identity during which many stakeholders are involved and various factors need to be taken into account.

3.2 The labour market and higher education

There is little contention that globally the landscape of HE has irrevocably changed over the last few decades. The most discernible changes have been the massification of HE as well as a move towards greater individual investment in HE in the form of student fees (Tomlinson 2012). On-going processes of democratisation, a drive to reduce social inequalities, and education being regarded as the primary agent of socialisation are amongst the reasons claimed for the massification of HE (Blessinger 2015; Leuze 2010). These changes coincided with the advent of the knowledge economy that requires knowledge workers with specific, mainly high-level skills and attributes (Bridgstock 2009). Within this context, HE is continuously pressurised to fulfil the human resource needs of the labour market in order to add value to the economy (Teichler 1999). At face value, a higher number of graduates supplied by the HE system should be able to satisfy the demand for knowledge workers from the labour market. This is however not the message from stakeholders in the labour market. Allistair Cox (2015), chief executive of Hays Global Skills Index, claims that the global skills shortage shows no sign of easing and labour markets are still experiencing shortages in a world of continuous change. The flip side of this message is that graduate unemployment seems to be growing. Twenty-five per cent of university graduates from African universities are unemployed and the situation is getting worse (Kigotho 2015). How should HE, and students and their parents

interpret these conflicting messages?

According to the World Economic Forum (2016), we are finding ourselves at the beginning of a Fourth Industrial Revolution in which graduates are confronted with continuous changes in the nature of work. From a market perspective, the need for very specifically trained graduates is emphasised. This perspective is reflected in the report, *Innovation Towards a Knowledge-Based Economy: Ten-Year Plan for South Africa* (DST 2007), foreseeing investment in human capital in very specific areas such as space science and technology, energy security and global climate change science. In the light of these demands from the government and the labour market, must we conclude that the main function of HE is to supply specifically trained graduates or should HE have a more comprehensive purpose?

The responsibility of HE with regard to the employability of graduates should be debated within the context of the overarching purpose of HE. This is, however, easier said than done as not all stakeholders agree on what the purpose of HE is. Historically higher education institutions (HEIs) have seen their mission as three-fold, namely the production, transferral and application of knowledge. Preparation for the world of work has not been regarded as the only function of HE or even its main function. Yet, some stakeholders (Tomlinson 2012) believe that in the 21st century the role of universities to prepare graduates for first-time employment has become crucial since the society in which we work and interact with one another has irrevocably changed. Blessinger (2015) supports the democratic theory of HE, maintaining that the ultimate purpose of HE is to promote personal agency through the development of freedom and responsibility. He views students entering HE as global citizens and believes that HEIs should act as global institutions that promote personal agency by developing practices that integrate different goals such as educating for high academic standards, employability, global citizenry and human development. The cultivating of personal agency through HE contributes to the process of development which continues both formally and informally throughout the student's life (Blessinger 2015; Holmes 2015). In our view the purpose of HE is complex and entails more than preparing a graduate for one vocation or for work performance immediately upon gaining employment. It should rather aim at producing well-rounded graduates who have experienced creative, imaginative and

high-quality learning to prepare them for life. It is against this background that we propose a framework for understanding graduate employability.

3.3 Conceptualising graduate employability

3.3.1 The skills approach

The skills approach to graduate employability has been and still is the dominant approach in most HEIs (Dunne and Bosch 2015; Holmes 2015). This is illustrated by Yorke's (2004, 8) well-known definition of graduate employability as 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.' This definition equates graduate employability to transferable competencies or skills, including content and technical knowledge, as well as generic skills. By implication graduates are considered to be employable due to their acquired skills and attributes (Barrie 2006).

Several such 'lists' indicating the necessary and desirable 'skills' for graduates have been produced by institutions, but Barrie (2006) holds that hardly any have a theoretical or conceptual basis, and Bridgstock (2009) notes that few studies attempt to demonstrate that well-developed generic skills lead to enhanced graduate employability. The skills and attributes approach implies that a graduate who struggles to find employment is lacking as he/she has not yet acquired the appropriate set of skills, and is therefore the only 'victim' to be blamed (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2003). Furthermore, Holmes (2015) points out that after twenty years of research the 'real' set of skills has yet to be determined. This approach further fails to explain differences in employment outcomes between graduates from different demographic groups (Holmes 2015).

3.3.2 Holmes's graduate identity approach

Our view of the purpose of HE as promoting personal agency through the development of a student during his/her engagement with all aspects of the student experience supports a developmental processual approach to graduate employability. Whereas an improvement in graduate employability would, according

to the skills and attributes approach, require the development of more appropriate and additional skills, the graduate identity approach is based on the development of the identity of the graduate in such a way that he/she is able to present him/herself to a potential employer, and stands a good chance of being employed. While the formal graduation of a student is marked by a specific event, the development of a graduate identity is a process (Dunne and Bosch 2015) of becoming a graduate in biographical and socially significant terms, which extends over varying periods of time (Holmes 2015).

The graduate identity approach was developed as an alternative to the skills approach (Holmes 1995). Holmes (1995, 2001) applied the practice-identity model of interpretation of performance to the notion of graduate employability. In the practice-identity model, performance is considered to be the interpretation of an activity within a specific context and set of social practices. The identity of the individual, unveiled by interpreting his/her actions, should be appropriate to the context (Holmes 2001). In the graduate employability context, a recruiter or possible employer would interpret the actions of a graduate applying for employment and would decide whether his/her identity is that of an employable person suited for the position.

The graduate is involved in a continuing process of self-identification during which significant others ascribe attributes to him/her (Holmes 2001). This is a process where 'personal identity meshes with social identity' (Holmes 2002, 145). Holmes (2002, 2013) adopts the term 'emergent identity' to distinguish it from either social or personal identity. Graduate identity is not an existent entity but rather an emergent outcome of social construction and negotiation arising from interactions with others (Harré 1993). The identity the individual lays claim to may be affirmed or disaffirmed by others; simultaneously these affirmations may be accepted or resisted by the individual (Holmes 2013, 2015).

Holmes (2013, 550) thus defines graduate employability in the context of graduate identity as 'the always temporary relationship that arises between an individual graduate and the field of employment opportunities, as the graduate engages with those who are the gatekeepers to those opportunities, particularly those who make selection decisions.' The emerging identity of the graduate is therefore constituted through a process of negotiation, which is presented by Holmes (2001, 2013, 2015)

as trajectories through different identity modalities. These identity modalities are represented as zones in Holmes's model of modalities of emergent identities (Figure 3.1), explained in further detail below.

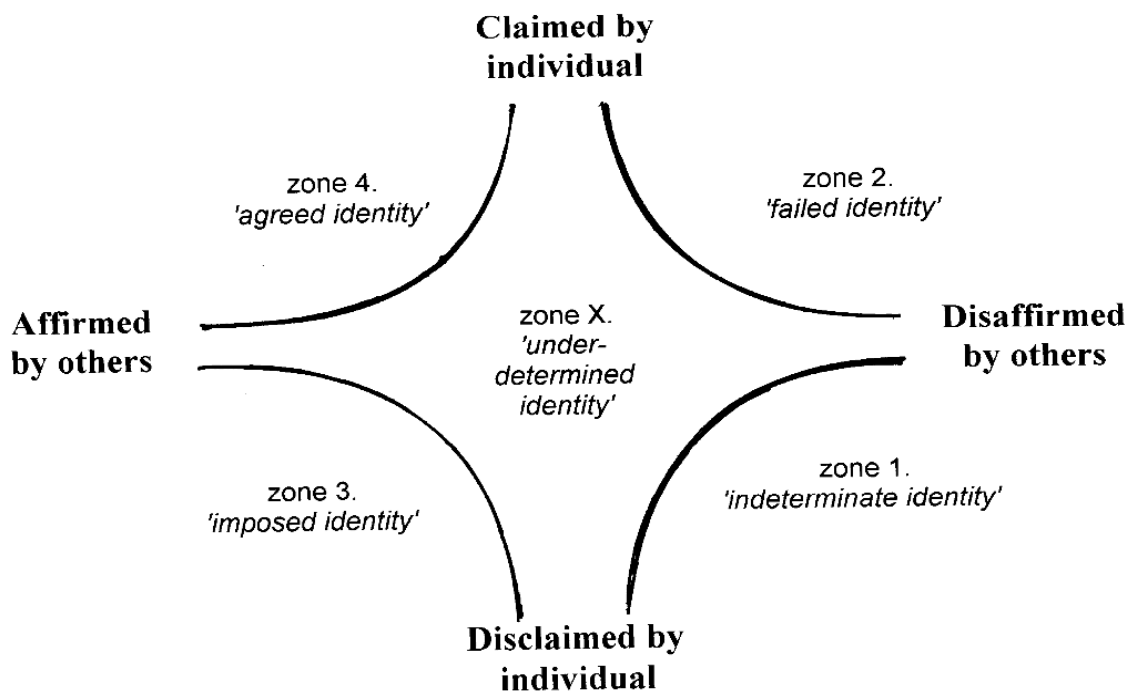


Figure 3.1: Claim-affirmation model of modalities of emergent identity (Holmes 2000)

In Figure 3.1 Zone 1, the 'indeterminate identity', represents the starting point of a graduate trajectory where he/she has not yet claimed an identity, nor has any identity been ascribed to him/her. An ideal graduate journey would be a transition directly to Zone 4, the position of an 'agreed identity'. In this position, the graduate has claimed to be a graduate and has been affirmed as such by possible employers or recruiters. However, not all transitions are that simple nor do they all follow the same trajectories. Graduate transitions may occur in any order. If an initial graduate claim is not affirmed by employers, the graduate moves into Zone 2, a position of failed or 'disaffirmed identity'. This would typically happen when a graduate does not succeed in finding employment or is forced to accept employment which does not fit his/her level of education. Zone 3 represents a modality where others ascribe a certain identity to the graduate but he/she rejects the identity. This 'imposed identity' could occur when the employment that the graduate accepted, does not prove to be what

he/she expected (Holmes 2001). Zone X, the central area in Figure 3.1, represents a crossing point between possible identities, an ‘under-determined identity’. In this position a claim is tentatively made or withdrawn and/or identification is tentatively affirmed or disaffirmed (Holmes 2014). When the graduate is in Zone X he/she has an unknown identity and awaits affirmation or disaffirmation. As mentioned previously, these emergent identities are not fixed, but rather fragile and subject to possible challenge and change.

During the process of negotiating with potential employers or recruiters the graduate would want to employ appropriate skills and attributes to warrant his/her claim of being graduate. Warranting is the means by which the graduate seeks affirmation of his/her identity by acting appropriately within a certain context (Dunne and Bosch 2015). The appropriate skills and attributes employed by the graduate in the warranting process are not a ‘set of achievements’ (Yorke 2004), but rather build and shape his/her vocabulary and assist him/her to warrant the claimed identity (Holmes 2013). A graduate would therefore need to develop such a vocabulary during his/her HE years to equip him/her for the warranting process.

Each graduate has a unique and often complicated journey into employment which started when he/she considered HE and made decisions about what to study. Analysing these journeys, described as trajectories of emerging identities, and developing typologies from the different trajectories followed, could inform HE of how to support graduates more effectively in the configuration of their identities and the warranting of their claim as graduates and could encourage graduates to take responsibility for the development of their own employability. This study aims to shed light on the journeys of 46 graduates by exploring their crossings into first-time employment from a graduate identity perspective.

3.4 Methodology

3.4.1 Aim of the study

This article explores the transition of graduates into first-time employment using the development of a graduate identity as a framework. The main research question was, ‘What were the experiences of first-time entrants into the labour market during their transition from graduate to employee?’ Two sub-questions informed the main

research question namely:

- (1) What strategies did these students employ at university in order to graduate successfully?
- (2) What strategies did these students employ to secure employment?

3.4.2 Research approach

The research was conducted according to an interpretive qualitative approach. By conducting qualitative research we gave the participants the opportunity to describe their experiences during the transition from HE into first-time employment. From their rich, descriptive narratives we were able to gain some understanding of their unique journeys.

3.4.3 Research context

This study was preceded by a graduate destination survey of the 2010 cohort of graduates from four universities in South Africa, conducted by a regional HE consortium.² The main purpose of the survey was to reveal the varied pathways into work for the 5 560 graduates who participated in the survey. Our study aims to investigate in more depth one of the pathways, namely the journeys of first-time entrants into employment.

3.4.4 Participants

Three survey questions were used to establish whether the graduate was a first-time entrant into the labour market: 1) 'What was your employment status just before you started studying towards the qualification you obtained in 2010?'; 2) 'What was your employment status on 1st of September 2012?'; and 3) 'When did you start the job you had on the 1st of September?'. This process produced a sample frame of 1 056 graduates. From this sample frame 46 participants were purposively selected to be representative of gender, race, home province, level of qualification, field of study, the four HEIs involved, and graduates' occupation during September 2012 (Table 3.1). Thirty-one of the 46 participants were first-generation students (FGSs) in other words students whose parents had not completed any form of tertiary education (McKay and Estrella 2008). This was established through survey data indicating the educational level of the parents as equal to or below Grade 12. Even though no

official statistics on FGS in the South African higher education system exist, one can assume that the majority of black students currently in the system (who constitute almost two-thirds of the total enrolment) are FGS, seeing that their parents would most probably have been excluded from higher education in the apartheid era when participation of blacks in higher education was severely restricted. Against this background we regarded the inclusion of a similar proportion of FGS in the study as important and necessary to obtain a realistic picture of graduates' experiences. Ethics clearance was obtained from each of the institutions involved.

Field of study		Level of qualification		Gender		Race		Sector employed	
AgriSciences	1	PhD	3	Male	20	African	14	HE	7
Arts and Social Sciences	10	Masters	3						
Economic and Management Sciences	12	Honours	5			Coloured	19	Private	22
Education	1	Postgraduate diploma	2						
Engineering	3	Bachelors	31	Female	26	Indian/Asian	1	Public	16
Law	1	Diploma	1						
Medicine and Health	5	Certificate	1			White	12	Unemployed	1
Science	13								

Table 3.1: Summary of selected participants

3.4.5 Data collection

Individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews of approximately forty minutes each were conducted with every participant. The rationale and purpose of the study was explained to participants who then read and signed an informed consent form. An interview schedule had been developed to guide participants' input on their experiences during their transition into employment. Although the interview schedule provided structure to the interview, it was supplemented by further probing questions on issues raised by participants in the individual interviews.

3.4.6 Data analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the transcriptions were checked for accuracy. In the first stage of the data analysis, the transcriptions were coded by means of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, ATLAS.ti. The coding

process revealed common themes in the graduates' narratives which were then categorised according to four phases of the graduate journey namely 1) entry into HE, 2) experiences in HE, 3) transition into employment, and 4) negotiating employment. Reid and others (2008) suggest that experiences along the graduate journey towards employment shape graduate identity. By analysing and interpreting participants' experiences in the four phases we developed a deeper understanding of the graduates' identity formation and served as backdrop for the interpretation of the graduate trajectories. The four phases in conjunction with the graduate trajectories expounded the strategies the graduates employed to graduate successfully and to secure employment.

Despite the fact that corresponding themes could be identified within the phases, the participants' journeys into employment showed a high degree of variability and complexity with an apparent lack of logic (Holmes 2013). These seemingly illogical journeys were clarified in the second stage of the data analysis when we mapped a trajectory of emerging identity for every graduate (Table 3.2). The trajectories from graduation into employment (up to the time of the research) were conceptualised in terms of the claim-affirmation model of modalities of emergent identity (Holmes 2015).

The credibility of the data analysis was supported by repeated reading of the transcripts as well as a comparison of the coding of the data separately done by each of us. The comparison indicated very similar interpretations of the data.

3.4.7 Limitations to the study

The most frequently cited limitation related to a small-scale qualitative study is that the findings are not considered to be generalisable to other contexts. This may be true. However, much of what we found connects to recent large-scale studies (Bhorat, Mayet and Visser 2012; Mok and Jiang 2016; Walker and Fongwa 2016) and as such adds credence to our findings.

3.5 Phases informing identity formation during the graduate journey

Research shows that graduate identity includes having a sense of meaning and self-esteem, confidence, understanding disciplinary knowledge, a focus on personal

development and lifelong learning, and an ability to transfer skills (Jackson 2014). By analysing participants' narratives according to the four phases and highlighting how these attributes are demonstrated, we aim to explicate the development of the graduates' identities during their journeys.

3.5.1 Phase 1: Entry into higher education

For graduate employability entry into HE is a significant point of transition and one would expect this step to be at least partly influenced by career decisions. O'Regan (2010) points out that graduate employability is linked to pro-active thoughts about careers. Yet, the participants' narratives revealed that they entered HE with only a vague idea of what they would do after their studies or what their prospective work would entail. Programme choices were made mostly on account of passion – what the participants liked or thought they liked. Their passions were informed by choice and/or availability of school subjects, their achievement in school subjects, personal experiences or what they considered their personal attributes to be, as reflected in Anelisa's³ (black, female, BA, FGS) narrative, *'Then what really draw me to psychology was that I found out that I'm more of a listener ...'* In some cases passion was overshadowed by a desperate need to enter HE, and students accepted second or third choices *'just to study something'* (Brandon - coloured, male, B Com PGD, FGS). The desperate need to enter HE emerged strongly amongst FGSs pointing to their belief in HE as a guarantee for employment. Often students were unsure of or uninformed about which courses were available and/or what the courses would entail. The lack of choice was specifically prevalent amongst students from rural areas where information was limited to *'okay, there's teacher, police, nurse'* (Phumza - black, female, B Tech Surveying, FGS).

In this phase little thought was given to possible employment options. It seemed as if they entered their studies with the belief that if they love what they do, everything will fall into place. In Chantelle's (coloured, female, B Soc Sc, FGS) words, *'I didn't know much about the field ... I just felt that I'm gonna take the chance, apply and see where it takes me.'* There were exceptions, such as Mark, (white, male, B Tech Surveying) *'I definitely looked at salary and the probability of employment ...'* However, what informed them about employment options often appeared to be based on hearsay or perceptions from friends or family, as highlighted by Anele

(black, male, B Tech Eng, FGS), *'I had my cousin's sister ... she suggested that I should do chemical engineering.'*

Mia's (white, female, B Sc Speech Therapy) perceptions about her chosen career echo those of most of the participants. She had a vague idea of what the work would entail and did not put much thought into her future career.

'And my impression is more like what the person would think of a speech therapist. You work with stutters. Maybe someone who can't use their voice nicely, you know? That was my impression of what it was going to be like. Or working with little children that can't say their words properly. But had I known that it also entailed breathing and swallowing disorders, which was very much more like things I didn't want to do in physiotherapy, I might have considered a much more different course.'

Most participants, regardless of their background, entered HE without explicitly exploring programme or employability options. They had not yet formed a clear idea of who they were or where they would end up. Although they chose a specific programme of study, they had not committed themselves to a specific career path. This phase is similar to what Marcia (1966) calls 'diffused' career identity. In this early stage, the students may have been overwhelmed by the number of available programmes or unaware of all the possible choices. They might also not have known how critical career decisions were at that stage of their graduate journeys. Some of the participants, as in Mark's (white, male, B Tech Surveying) example, revealed a 'foreclosed' career identity by being strongly committed to a dream for the future, but without exploring current realities (Marcia 1966). Most participants, however, only understood their career paths retrospectively. Their identities were marked by them entering HE without thinking about their journeys into employment or future careers.

3.5.2 Phase 2: Experiences in higher education

Entering HE is typically a confusing and overwhelming experience for many students (Leuze 2010). The participants' narratives revealed that they experienced HE to be a challenging environment. Being there resulted in them having to negotiate a range of challenges including academic and financial difficulties, and adapting to a new

environment. This was reflected in Ashlin's (coloured, female, B Com, FGS) narrative, *'It was a lot harder than I had thought ... and I wasn't prepared in that sense.'* Some participants went into this process with confidence as Joseph (white, male, B Soc Sc) indicated, *'And so I felt fairly confident being able to go and speak to the people.'* He, as others, had been taught by his parents who had completed tertiary education, that *'if you need help you should go and, you should ask for it.'* FGSs were, however, more vulnerable in the absence of family members who had a tertiary education (Mitchell et al. 2015).

Regardless of whether family members had completed tertiary education or not, participants singled out family and friends as the most important support structures. These family ties helped the students to 'get by' by providing support and reinforcing their identity (Vaughan et al. 2015). This support motivated the participants to take responsibility for their studies. They regarded themselves as hard workers. An extract from Vuyiseka's (black, female, MSc, FGS) narrative points to a sense of self-belief and being an agent of one's own success:

'I am a person who has a lot of initiative. Like I said, even in the ninth grade, I didn't have a math's teacher but I didn't fail. I'm that type of person ... if there is no help, I create the help around me.'

This was evident in most of the narratives, even amongst the FGSs. Kapp and others (2014) point out that investment in such discourses can lead to the achievement of a sense of fulfilment and the strengthening of self-esteem.

Varied perceptions of institutional support were reported. Some believed they had been well supported, while others, mostly the FGSs, maintained a 'no problem' discourse. *'There were mentors, but I never attended them [the mentoring sessions]. So, I was fine'* (Thabang - black, male, B Ed, FGS). A few participants had experienced a lack of support by HEIs, *'The environment I don't think was supportive, you know?'* (Rorisang - black, male, B Com). The extent to which participants had made use of the institutional support may serve as an indicator of how engaged they were with the institution and to what extent this engagement shaped their identity formation (Jackson 2014).

Differences in participants' perceptions of their almae matres were noticeable. Participants from two of the four institutions perceived themselves as disadvantaged in comparison to students from the other two institutions. In hindsight Anele (black, male, B Tech Eng, FGS) said, *'I think if I had proper guidance from high school and went straight to [university name], maybe I would be in a better position now.'* References to a lack of sufficient information on programmes and institutions to inform their choices were prevalent amongst the FGSs. Anele regarded his qualification as less valuable than a similar qualification from one of the other universities. Rebecca (coloured, female, B Soc Sc Hons, FGS) indicated how proud she was of her institution and that being a graduate of *'Africa's best tertiary institution'* would be to her advantage. As an aside, a noticeable difference between Rebecca and some of the other FGSs was Rebecca's reference to a quality secondary school which supported her in making choices pertaining to HE. This points to the importance of the role of basic education in preparing students for HE. The graduates' perceptions of the status or quality of the institutions shaped both their graduate identities and the confidence with which they embarked on their search for employment. This reflects findings from research that confirms employers' bias against certain HE institutions (Baldry 2015) as well as institutional variations in earnings (Britton et al. 2016).

Seventy per cent of the participants continued with postgraduate studies immediately after obtaining their first qualification. Some participants completed their postgraduate studies before graduating in 2010, while others embarked on part-time postgraduate studies. For them postgraduate studies presented a way of gaining positional advantage in a perceived oversupplied labour market, and this contributed to their identities. Roland (coloured, male, B Com Hons, FGS) for example, reflected, *'I didn't want to be like everyone else ... I thought what would set me apart?'* He continued with an honours degree. This, however, still did not guarantee a smooth transition into the labour market since larger numbers of graduates with postgraduate qualifications have resulted in the devaluing of qualifications (Brown and Hesketh 2004). At the time of the interview Roland was still in a post that did not even require a degree.

The graduate identities that have emerged up to this point demonstrated a culmination of the investments the graduates made in themselves as well as those made by others. The development process and the emergent identities up to that point were unique for each participant. The discussion of the themes that emerged in the next two phases form the backdrop against which the graduate trajectories in the second stage of the data analysis are interpreted, and provides the context in which they had to negotiate their graduate identities.

3.5.3 Phase 3: Transition into employment

After graduation, the next big step in a graduate's journey is the transition into employment. Some participants were already thinking about this step before graduation, as indicated by Jason (coloured, male, B Com, FGS), '*I applied way before graduation*', while others like Brandon (coloured, male, B Com PGD, FGS), '*didn't even think of the job, I was just thinking of graduating at the time.*' A striking feature of the participants' narratives is the total lack of institutional support in making this transition. This is highlighted by Kopano (black, male, B Com, FGS), '*No, my relationship with my university I can say ended when I finished my degree.*' Carin (coloured, female, NHC Acc, FGS) explained how intimidating her experiences of job interviews were and that she did not feel prepared by her institution, '*They [HEI] don't even prepare you for that. So, nothing about presenting yourself, communication, no.*' In some cases, participants reported on some institutional support with compiling CVs and preparing application letters, but for the most, the Internet was their '*best friend.*' The Internet was the most common source of information during the initial search for employment as Reece (coloured, male, ND Biotech, FGS) remembered, '*like job advertisements on the internet. Yeah, mostly on the internet*' and Jason (coloured, male B Com, FGS) confirmed, '*I just Googled, you know?*' Online applications were the standard method of applying for employment. This caused frustration amongst the participants as they received no or limited feedback from such applications and Tanya (black, female, B Eng, FGS) pondered whether '*they even look at the online applications.*'

The interviews revealed that the search for employment was mostly a difficult and challenging process, as Tanya (black, female, B Eng, FGS) recalled, '*That was a very difficult thing I had to do.*' Liezel (coloured, female, B Tech Food Tech, FGS)

remembered how she sent out CVs *'like crazy'*, but *'nobody wanted to take a chance, you know ... because also I think because of my in-service ... I didn't really do any like testing, lab work.'* Liezel perceived her in-service training as inadequate and believed it contributed to her struggle to find employment. In some cases the search process was facilitated by internships, part-time work or bursaries associated with specific firms as indicated by Abbigail (white, female, B Sc), *'For every year I had the bursary, I had to work for them.'* The duration to secure employment ranged from being employed immediately to more than two years. Most participants eventually secured employment through a referral from a friend or family member. Their social networks that, according to Soudien (2008), form an important resource for the productive formation of identity amongst young people, were wide-ranging and affected the type of employment they secured.

3.5.4 Phase 4: Negotiating employment

As with the transition into HE, the transition into employment was complex and varied due to many factors affecting the transition. Some participants felt unprepared for employment and experienced a *'big gap'* between HE and the world of work. Brandon (coloured, male, B Com PGD, FGS) for example felt he lacked sufficient people skills to function effectively in the labour market and was not prepared in that sense. He explained, *'it's not just about theory ... people is difficult to work with.'* They were overwhelmed by what was expected from them. Their theoretical knowledge was adequate but they did not always understand *'where it fits in.'* They were used to managing their own time and suddenly were expected to function in rigid structures. A few participants indicated that they felt prepared for the challenge of work life despite the huge gap, as revealed by Tanya (black, female, B Eng, FGS), *'I felt like I was well armed to cope with every challenge actually.'* Despite feeling overwhelmed, all participants experienced that they were well supported in their jobs. Support varied from formal induction programmes to informal support from colleagues.

Joseph's (white, male, B Soc Sc) reflection, *'I am hoping to go overseas soon to go and kind of get work experience'* revealed that he, like most of the participants, consciously reflected on his career path. Chad (coloured, male, B Tech Environ Health, FGS) made a deliberate decision to move from the public to the private

sector since, *'you know, I like what they're [public sector] doing here, but I want a bit more progressive environment ... they [public sector] are very chilled ... I want to go into the private sector.'* Even in the face of real barriers they still thought about how they were going to maintain financial stability, secure a permanent job or get a promotion as Rizqah (coloured, female, B Com, FGS) contemplated, *'hopefully once I'm done [additional studies] if all goes well, I'll be moving to the accounting department and things will go much better.'* Rizqah has been underemployed since she entered the labour market.

Their main definition of success in employment was being happy and content. This was associated with maintaining financial security and family relationships as well as reaching their goals. Ashlin (coloured, female, B Com, FGS) captured her view, and that of many others, of success as, *'being self-sufficient ... being happy [and] having healthy relationships.'* Most participants indicated that they were en route to success and were able to do so due to their intrinsic motivation and hard work. They used words such as *'drive'*, *'initiative'*, *'contribute'*, *'extra mile'*, and *'volunteering'* to describe factors that contributed to their journeys to success.

Despite some overlapping themes in the journeys of the participants, a high degree of variability existed which is represented by their graduate trajectories. Through these trajectories we show how each participant uniquely negotiated his/her claim on a graduate identity.

3.6 Graduate trajectories according to the claim-affirmation model of modalities of emergent identity

The second stage of the data analysis consisted of mapping a trajectory for each participant within the model of modalities of emergent identities (Table 3.2). The process of developing a trajectory consisted of analysing every participant's journey by classifying each step of the journey into employment in terms of the identity zones identified earlier (see Figure 3.1). The graduate journeys all started in Zone 1. The participants were in possession of a degree and ready to move to Zone X anticipating affirmation/disaffirmation. Some had even moved to Zone X before the formal graduation ceremony. From Zone 1 they moved back and forth through the zones as depicted in Table 3.2. Due to the number of participants not all trajectories

can be discussed in detail.

3.6.1 Development of the trajectory: an example

As an example we discuss the development of Tanya's (black, female, B Eng, FGS) trajectory as it includes all possible zones. Tanya started searching for employment in January after graduating the previous December. Nothing came of her initial applications and in February, being desperate for an income, she returned to the university and registered for a master's degree. A study bursary would provide the needed income. While already registered and studying, she received an email about a job option from a friend who urged her to apply. She reluctantly applied and was pleasantly surprised when the application resulted in a permanent post. She continued her studies part-time. At the time of the interview, she was still in the same post and did not feel challenged anymore. She was doing the same thing over and over and could '*sing and dream*' the job. Tanya was considering other options at the time.

Not being able to secure employment initially Tanya experienced disaffirmation of her identity as a graduate worthy of employment (Zone 2). She chose to remain in a tentative position (Zone X) by not claiming a graduate identity, but rather registering as a postgraduate student. Thereafter, she gained an 'agreed identity' by securing employment fit for her education (Zone 4). After a few years, she felt the job did not challenge her anymore and this resulted in an 'imposed identity' (Zone 3). She moved back to an 'under-determined identity' while considering what to do next. (Zone X). Her trajectory can thus be represented as: 1-X-2-X-X-4-X-3-X.

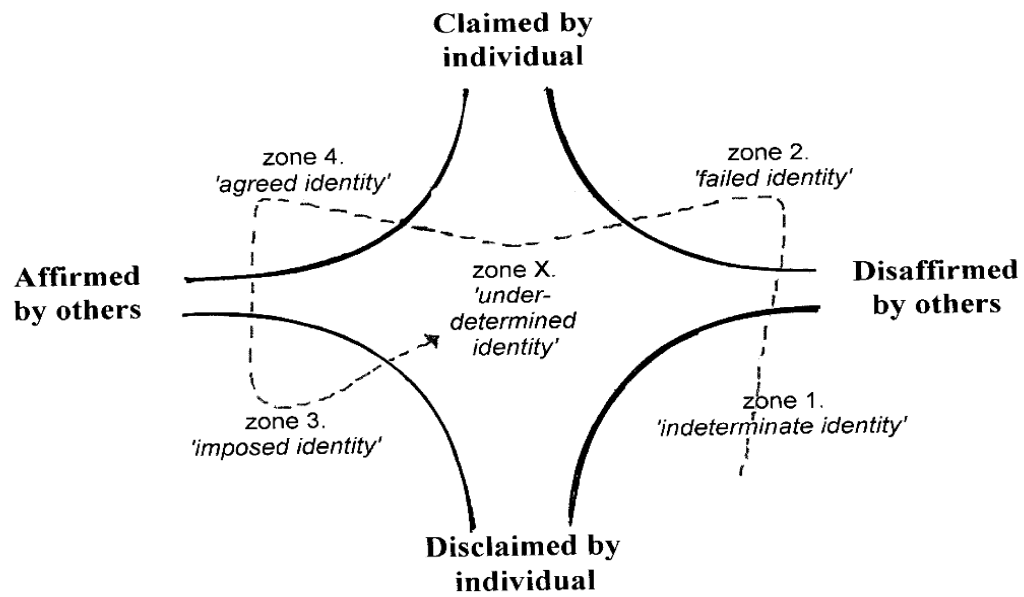


Figure 3.2: Tanya's trajectory through the modalities of graduate identity

The trajectories of all 46 participants are represented in Table 3.2. The first 31 participants were FGSs, and the participants who followed a professional career are indicated with a (P).

Participant		Graduate trajectory																	
1	Sibahle (P)	1	X	4	X	4													
2	Abongile	1	X	4	X	3	X	4											
3	Faith (P)	1	X	4	X	4	X												
4	Anelisa	1	1	X	4	4													
5	Kopano	1	X	2	X	2	X	4											
6	Roland	1	1	X	2	X	2	X	2	X									
7	Rizqah	1	X	2	X	1	X	2	X	2	X	2	X						
8	Brandon	1	X	4	X	3	X	2	X	2	X	2	X						
9	John	1	X	2	X	1	X	2	X	4	X	3	X						
10	Reece	1	X	2	X	4													
11	Mpho	1	X	2	X	X	2	X	1	X	X								
12	Carin	1	X	2	X	1	X	2	2	X	2								
13	Phumza	1	X	4	X	3	X	4	X	3	X	4							
14	Chad	1	X	4	4	4	X	3	X	X	4	X	1						
15	Liezel	1	X	2	X	X	2	X	2	X	4	4							
16	Anele	1	X	4	4	X	2	X	2	X	4	X	3	X					
17	Thabang	1	X	4	X	2	X	4	X	4	X	2	X	4	X	4	X	3	X
18	Ntsu	1	X	2	X	2	X	4	X	4	X	2	X	4	X	3	X	4	X
19	Rowan	1	X	4	X	4													
20	Tanya	1	X	2	X	X	4	X	3	X									
21	Kaylin	1	X	2	X	4	X	4	X	4	4								
22	Jason	1	X	4	X	3	X	4	X	3	X	4							
23	Kayla	1	X	2	X	4	X	2	X	2	X	2	X						
24	Vuyiseka	1	X	2	X	4	X	4	X	3	X	4	X						
25	Rebecca	1	X	4	X	X	4	X											
26	Jenel	1	X	4	X	4	X	4	X	4									
27	Reuben	1	X	4	X	3	X	4	X	3	X	4	X						
28	Chantelle	1	X	4	X	4	X	2	X	4	X	4	4						
29	Hope	1	X	4	X	3	X	4	X	4	X	4	X	4					
30	Leighthon (P)	1	X	4	X	4	X	2	X	4	X	2	X	4					
31	Ashlin	1	X	2	X	4	X	4	X	3	X	4							
32	Andre (P)	1	X	4	X	4	X												
33	Michelle	1	X	2	X	X	4	4											
34	Mark	1	X	4	X	4	X												
35	Agnes	1	X	2	X	4	X												
36	Tamlyn	1	X	4	X	3	X	3	X	4	4								
37	Sue	1	X	4	X	3	X	2	X	4	X	4	X						
38	Vernon (P)	1	X	4	X	4													
39	Abbigail	1	X	4	4	4													
40	Lee	1	X	2	X	4													
41	Sharon	1	X	2	X	4	X												
42	Clifton	1	X	4	X	4	4												
43	Rorisang	1	X	2	X	4	4	X	4	X	4	X							
44	Pauline	1	X	2	X	X	4	X	4										
45	Mia	1	X	4	X	4	X	3	X										
46	Joseph	1	X	4	X	3	X	X	4	X									

Table 3.2: Graduate trajectories according to the model of modalities of emergent identity

Without much analysis it is clear that the trajectories of the first 31 graduates, the FGSs, were in general longer and more complex than that of the non-first generation graduates. An in-depth analysis of the trajectories follows in 3.6.2 and 3.6.3.

3.6.2 Typologies in the trajectories

Within the trajectories certain typologies representative of actual moves emerged repeatedly. The following discussion explicates the processes of warranting claims by considering recurring patterns within the graduate trajectories.

a) Typology: 2-X-4

Twenty cases emerged where participants could initially not secure employment. Although their initial claims as graduates were disaffirmed, they eventually gained affirmation of their graduate status. To be able to resist a disaffirmed identity at some point(s) in a trajectory (in Zone 1 or Zone 2) the graduates must have had enough confidence in their identity as a graduate, even though they found themselves in this area fraught with uncertainty. The experience of initial disaffirmation, even if it is followed by an affirmation, confirms that a degree does not guarantee an easy journey into employment.

Although many participants presented this typology in sections of their journeys, what happened during the movement from a disaffirmed identity to an affirmed identity is unique. Rorisang (black, male, B Com) was not anxious to secure employment in the first three months after graduation since he felt he needed a break. Although he did send CVs out, he only really started job hunting when his parents threatened to stop his allowance. Kopano (black, male, B Com, FGS), on the other hand, felt hopeless and despondent when he couldn't secure employment since he had believed that his degree would enable him to change his family's difficult circumstances. Kopano's socio-economic circumstances implied a totally different experience of a movement from disaffirmed to affirmed identity than that of Rorisang.

b) Typology: 2-X-2-X-2-X / 2-2-X-2

Five cases of typologies of not being able to obtain a graduate job were revealed. The participants, who were all FGSs, struggled to secure employment fit for their education despite one having an advanced diploma in management and another a master's degree in public administration. At the time of the research all five participants were in non-graduate jobs, but were continuously searching for more appropriate employment. What was noticeable was that they all tended to limit the range of jobs, job sectors or geographical areas in which they applied. Reflecting their 'failed' identities, they did not believe that they were able to achieve more than those jobs (Brown and Hesketh 2004). Although they were confronted with disaffirmation time after time, they still revealed aspirational capital (Yosso 2005) by remaining hopeful, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.

c) Typology: 2-X-X

After an initial disaffirmation, four participants re-established their claims by furthering their studies. Pauline (white, female, LLB) and Michelle (white, female, LLD) opted for further studies since they were uncertain about the careers they wanted to follow and had enough support to make such a decision. For Tanya (black, female, B Eng, FGS), furthering her studies would mean a possible bursary and food to eat, while Liezel (coloured, B Tech Food Tech, FGS) regarded further studies as a way to secure employment at a later stage since she could not find a job after her first graduation. Liezel eventually accepted a non-graduate post, since she was desperate to earn an income after still struggling to find employment after the completion of her postgraduate studies. Once more, this analysis speaks to the unique experiences of graduates in what may seem like similar journeys on paper.

d) Typology: 4-X-3

Twenty-one cases of the trajectory from 'under-determined' to 'imposed identity' (X-3), where this is preceded by 'achieved identity' (4-X-3), emerged. These were related to graduates who either became disillusioned by what the job proved to be or who realised they were stagnating and wanted to move on in order to further their careers. The actions taken by each participant after being ascribed an imposed identity varied and were an indication of the influence of both structural factors like

socio-economic circumstances as well as individual agency. Sue (coloured, female, B Tech Surface Design) resigned, without having another job, when she realised her current post would not support her future career. She motivated her decision by indicating that she was stagnating and that her parents would support her. Hope (coloured, female, B Soc Sc, FGS) used her social networks to find other employment. Some just remained in the under-determined identity position as they were uncertain what to do next.

The discussion above points to the complex and developmental nature of emerging graduate identities. The development of such an identity does not stop at graduation, but requires graduates to 're-identify' themselves throughout the different phases of their career progression (Tomlinson 2012). The analysis also highlights the effect of structural factors and how the participants' reacted to their circumstances.

3.6.3 Analysis of trajectories

The move through the crossing point, Zone X, was often supported by social capital. Social capital can be defined as networks that enable or disable individuals or groups (Tierney 2006). Almost without exception, participants confirmed the use of social networks in finding employment. The quality of the secured employment was strongly associated with the quality of the networks available which in turn were influenced by family background and social inheritance (Behtoui 2015). A recent large scale study by Mok and Jiang (2016) points to the increased importance of social capital in securing employment.

The average number of moves (including all the transitional X-phases) for FGSs was 10.56, while for non-first generation students it was 7.33 moves. This points to the significant disadvantage that FGSs experience in making the transition into employment. Many studies (Badenhorst and Kapp 2013; Heymann and Carolissen 2011; McKay and Estrella 2008) point to the challenges FGSs have to overcome in HE. It does not seem as if their journeys after graduation are necessarily less complicated than in HE.

The quality and type of HE institutions attended by the participants played a role in the affirmation of claims in the graduate trajectories (Tomlinson 2012). The percentage of failed identities in the trajectories per HE institution varied from 4.9 per

cent and 9.35 per cent to 17.05 per cent and 17.76 per cent respectively. This influence of institutional reputation was corroborated by the participants' perceptions of their institutions (see also Bhorat et al. 2012; Walker and Fongwa 2016).

As expected, the graduate trajectories for professional careers presented as shorter, less complex journeys (see Table 3.2). The average moves between zones in these trajectories during the past five years were only seven per trajectory (including all the transitional X-phases). This average included Leighton's (Indian, male, MBChB, FGS) 13 moves over the past five years as he deliberately moved between hospitals to secure a specialist post. This corresponds to Leuze's (2010) findings which put graduates with occupation-specific training at a significant advantage.

During the interviews references to contract posts were almost equal to those to permanent posts. This is consistent with a study by Schomberg and Teichler (2011) which reports that many European graduates begin their careers with part-time or contract-type employment.

The graduate trajectories were mostly difficult journeys reflecting a sequence of stop-gap jobs and high mobility (Leuze 2010). After five years in the labour market the average number of moves in the trajectories of the graduates was 9.5. Graduates should therefore be prepared to continuously develop their identities and consistently navigate their careers (Bridgstock 2009), and so skilfully negotiate their career trajectories.

3.7 Conclusion: The significance of a graduate identity

In this study we explored the realities of graduates' transitions into first-time employment in the South African labour market by viewing graduate employability from an emerging identity perspective. Although certain overlapping themes emerged, the graduates' transitions into employment presented as complex, multi-layered and unique journeys signifying the range of factors that impact this journey. Tomlinson and Holmes (2016) emphasise the importance of phronetic research. That is research oriented towards development of knowledge in order to explain the issue being researched, but also research that leads to action. Based on the analysis of trajectories of emergent identities supported by a thematic analysis we gained insight into the complexity of graduate transitions. Major factors that impacted the

journeys were the importance of social networks, institutional reputation, whether a professional career was followed, and whether the student was a FGS. It is now time to take action and support graduates in the development of their graduate identity. HEIs can take a variety of initiatives to this effect.

We argue that the development of a graduate identity in which enhanced graduate employability is embedded, may support graduates during these difficult negotiations and that HE has a responsibility in explicitly emphasising the importance of developing the self-concept and confidence associated with a graduate identity (Jackson 2014). The value of having confidence during the journey into employment was mentioned by a number of participants. However, even more striking were the references to 'not ready', 'unprepared' and 'immature' and silences about HE's contribution to the development of employability and support during the transition into employment. Much effort is put into facilitating access to and success in HE, but then the journey ends. We suggest that HE should journey with graduates up to the point of first-time employment. Does this mean that HE has the sole responsibility with regard to the development of the graduate's employability? Certainly not.

From the analysis of the graduate trajectories of emergent identities, it is clear that decisions and choices made by the graduates themselves influenced their graduate transitions. In some instances graduates' choices limited their opportunities, while in other cases decisions enabled graduates to secure employment which would have seemed unlikely considering external factors. Clearly, the personal agency of a graduate plays in on his/her employability and a graduate has to take responsibility for the development of his/her own employability. How does HE's responsibility then link to the graduate's responsibility towards his/her own employability?

Students need to be made aware of the importance of the development of their employability. In the thematic analysis it became clear that very few graduates entered HE with pro-active thoughts about future careers. It seems as if generally non-first generation students entered HE as a natural next step after secondary school, while FGSs entered HE primarily because they saw it as guaranteeing good employment opportunities. HE should, as part of student development, embed the concept of employability into the curriculum. The development of graduate employability is especially important in the South African context of high levels of

youth unemployment and poverty in which graduates may contribute to building a fair and equitable society.

Would the development of a graduate identity guarantee employment? Not necessarily, but this study shows that graduates would benefit from a strong graduate identity and that such an identity may strengthen how they present themselves to employers. This could improve their chances of securing employment fit for their education.

3.8 Notes

1. All four universities are public institutions of which one is a university of technology, while the others are traditional universities. Of the latter three, two are historically white universities.
2. The regional consortium is a section 21 company representing the four universities whose graduates participated in the research.
3. In reporting the data we anonymised participants by using pseudonyms for all first names. Verbatim quotations were translated from Afrikaans, where applicable, and filler sounds were deleted to enhance readability without changing the meaning. Identifiers indicating race, gender, qualification and whether the participant is a FGS are used to provide context to each participant's response when used in the findings.

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CHAPTER 4

Article 2: From graduate to employee: exploring graduates' careers from a career management perspective

Abstract: Even though most higher education institutions are engaging with the graduate employability agenda, little empirical research exists on graduates' perspectives on their career success and whether higher education actually contributed to their success. This article explores graduates' perspectives on their success in the workplace from a career management perspective and investigates how higher education studies fed back into their careers. Semi-structured interviews with 46 graduates from four universities in South Africa were analysed to explore the graduates' viewpoints. A thematic analysis of the data revealed that a focus on and an engagement with careers occurred primarily at or after graduation; silences are evident about specific career preparation in higher education. Although some graduates engaged with aspects of career management in negotiating their careers, most negotiated their careers by interpreting economic, social, political and cultural parameters. The value of higher education was associated with secure employment and to a lesser extent with personal development. Feedback on career success varied between being successful and unsuccessful, while there is little evidence of higher education's contribution to an enhanced career management experience. This study suggests that higher education institutions should more pro-actively guide students throughout their years of study in the career management process in order to enhance graduate employability and the transition into employment.

Keywords employability; career management; university graduates; transition; higher education contribution

4.1 Introduction

The impetus for this study comes from an interest in how employed graduates perceive their success in the workplace and the contribution of higher education (HE) to their success. Various studies have linked the success of graduates as employees to the concept of employability (Berntson, Sverke, and Marklund 2006; Hager, Holland, and Beckett 2002; O'Regan 2010; Yorke and Knight 2004). Although the debate about the purpose of HE is unresolved and ongoing, literature on graduate employability indicates that most higher education institutions (HEIs) have committed themselves to producing employable graduates (Tomlinson 2012). Little empirical research exists, however, on how graduates perceive their success and the contribution of HE to their career paths (Bridgstock 2009). In this article we aim to uncover graduates' perspectives on success in the workplace and on how HE studies fed back into their careers.

Regardless of the fact that there is little consensus amongst academics about the focus on graduate employability, the concept has become an agenda point in HE (Teichler 1999), and students, and their parents, expect that as graduates they will easily and quickly find employment. Many universities have engaged with the employability agenda by reconsidering the attributes graduates should acquire and focusing on the development of generic skills in order to enhance graduates' employability. Within the context of growing job insecurity in the labour market and the necessity to cope with continual changes in tasks and roles, Bridgstock (2009) suggests a broader perspective of graduate employability than that of the dominant skills approach. She steers towards an approach where graduates should have the ability to navigate the working world and successfully manage their career building process, based on attributes such as lifelong learning and adaptability. We suggest that this broader approach to employability provides a useful lens to explore graduates' perspectives on their success in employment.

The article reports on original empirical research that analysed the narratives of 46 graduates from four universities¹ in South Africa (SA). From their narratives we could gain insight into the experiences of graduates during their first five years in employment, the processes they employed to manage their careers, and their perspectives on the value of HE with regard to their careers. We also developed an

understanding of how they perceived success and navigated their careers in order to be successful. Firstly, the paper provides contextual background on the labour market in which graduates function and manage their careers. Secondly, we present as theoretical framework for graduate employability a career management approach with specific reference to the attainment of success in the labour market. Despite certain shortcomings, which we highlight, this theory is considered useful in this specific context. Thirdly, we give an overview of the research methodology. Fourthly, we present the findings within the context of career management and discuss the participants' perspectives on the value of HE. Finally, we present our conclusions and recommendations on the contribution of HE to the preparation of graduates for the labour market.

4.2 The labour market: workplace of the graduate

The emphasis on the employability of graduates ensues from the assumption that we are working in a globally competitive 'knowledge-driven' environment (Smetherham 2009), where knowledge is viewed as a key resource for economic wealth, societal well-being and innovation (Teichler 1999). At the same time the labour market is characterised by less job security and an increase in part-time and contract positions or employment for limited periods of time. Also, job structures and skills requirements seem to change at an ever-increasing pace (Bridgstock 2009; Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010; Teichler 1999).

Graduates entering the South African labour market also face challenges such as an economy characterized by slow or even zero growth and an unemployment rate which peaked in June 2016 at 26.7 per cent. A very concerning statistic is that 53.6 per cent of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are not in education, employment or training (Trading Economics 2016). Although the graduate unemployment rate is much lower at six per cent, the rate has doubled since 2008 (Van Broekhuizen 2013). Race and class are still predictors of employment outcomes (Baldry 2015) even though policies such as the Employment Equity Act (EEA) and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) have been put in place to eliminate the persistent racial inequalities in the labour market as a consequence of apartheid.

This is the work context that graduates entering employment in SA are expected to be prepared for; essentially it means that they must be able to function in a more fluid working world (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010) in which a HE qualification does not guarantee employment. The implications for HE as the ‘producer’ of graduates with high-level skills and work-ready graduates need to be considered carefully.

4.3 Conceptualising graduate employability

4.3.1 The skills approach

The growing emphasis on the role of HE in preparing graduates for employment is closely linked to the notion of graduate employability (Holmes 2013). Various theoretical approaches to graduate employability have been developed of which the skills approach is dominant. This approach maintains that graduates, as a result of their HE experiences, should possess skills, understandings and attributes which would make them employable and successful (Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015; Yorke 2004). Differences in employment outcomes are hence viewed as a reflection of the graduate’s set of achievements or lack thereof. Although the skills approach remains dominant, this approach has been criticized as being narrow (Bridgstock 2009), conceptually weak (Barrie 2005), unable to explain variations in graduate outcomes (Holmes 2013), and victimising the graduate for a possible lack of skills or attributes (Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015). In consideration of the critique against the skills approach, we suggest a development processual perspective to graduate employability and therefore employ a process of career management lens in the study.

4.3.2 Graduate employability as a process of career management

Bridgstock (2009) proposes a view of graduate employability as a process of career management as an alternative to the narrow skills approach. Career management can be regarded as the ability to build a career; to purposely manage the interaction of work, learning and other aspects of the individual’s life throughout his/her lifetime (Bridgstock 2009). This perspective of graduate employability supports our position that HE is not only about preparing students for the world of work, but more broadly about the development of students to become well-rounded individuals who can

function responsibly in a global context. The career management approach recognizes career management as a developmental process, and that work (career) continuously interacts with other life facets.

The career management process entails the individual making a series of decisions (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010), while engaging in reflective and evaluative processes (Bridgstock 2009). Okay-Somerville and Scholarios (2015) refer to this process as career self-management as it involves consistent career-related information gathering and planning. Such a process would provide a student with a realistic preview of probable opportunities, and would thus be essential for a successful university-to-work transition. The implication of viewing graduate employability in this manner is that employability as career management should start as early as students' considerations of programme options in HE. Pre-emptive consideration of a future career is closely connected with securing and maintaining meaningful employment (O'Regan 2010), alluding to the responsibility of an individual to take proactive decisions during the career management process (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010).

We contemplate career management below by integrating frameworks suggested by Bridgstock (2009), Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk (2010), and Okay-Somerville and Scholarios (2015). We discuss four steps in the career management process while emphasizing the integrated and iterative nature of the process.

a) Career exploration

The first step in the career management process is career exploration. This is the process of collecting and analysing information regarding oneself and the work environment (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010; Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015). This is done by employing self-management and career building skills (Bridgstock 2009). Self-management involves attaining self-knowledge through evaluating and knowing oneself by exploring one's values, interests and abilities. (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010). Career building involves gaining knowledge of different occupations, organisations and opportunities in the labour market and identifying the most suitable options for oneself (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010; Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015). Engagement with both

self-management and career building skills is an interdependent process which shapes the career exploration process. Awareness of the self and the environment leads to more appropriate and more realistic goal setting which is the second step in the career management process (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010).

b) Career goal setting

Goal setting is crucial in terms of career performance. Greenhouse and others (2010) define a career goal as a desired outcome in the workplace that a person intends to attain. Research indicates that employees who are committed to specific goals outperform those without goals or with a weak commitment to established goals (Locke and Latham 2002). The development of realistic and personally meaningful career goals is a self-management skill which gives direction to the career exploration process (Bridgstock 2009), and facilitates putting strategies in place to achieve those goals. The interdependency between career exploration, goal setting and career strategies reflects the iterative nature of the career management process.

c) Employing career strategies

Career strategies enable one to achieve career goals, which means that employees need to identify and engage in strategic activities which could benefit the attainment of their goals (Bridgstock 2009). Working hard and being loyal is not enough to advance one's career, but rather engaging in activities that would develop career competencies, and ensure appropriate work experience (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010), goal attainment and career performance. Guidance seeking, for example, is an activity with the potential of enhancing goal attainment and career performance; this can also be related to career appraisal which comprises the last step in the career management process (Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015).

d) Career appraisal

In a continuously fluctuating labour market employees need to frequently evaluate their career choices and engage in career appraisal (Larson 2006). Career appraisal is the process by which an individual evaluates and reconsiders career choices and employs feedback to enable further planning. This process enables the monitoring of

career progress through adaptive feedback from peers, employers and/or significant others (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010). Feedback closes the career management cycle as it provides critical information about a person, his/her career and his/her progress towards goals. Through the appraisal process an employee is positioned to re-evaluate goals and related strategies (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010) to ensure effective career management and a successful career.

4.4 Career management and a successful career

Having a successful career does not have the same meaning for everybody and is best assessed by the person him/herself (Hall 2002). One definition of career success refers to the positive material and psychological outcomes that result from work-related activities and experiences (Seibert 2006). A distinction can be drawn between objective and subjective measures of a successful career. Whereas objective measures normally focus on employment, appropriate training and wages, subjective measures recognise work values, the realisation of such values and job satisfaction (Arnesen and Støren 2011). An understanding of an individual's career success can be developed by analysing the effectiveness of his/her career management (Seibert 2006).

Greenhaus, Callanan, and Kaplan (1995) call attention to two signals of effective career management. The first signal points to compatibility between career decisions and talents, interests, values and lifestyle preferences, while the second signal focuses on the adaptability of an individual to accommodate fluctuations that might threaten such compatibility. Regarding signal one, research has demonstrated that person-occupation fit enhances job satisfaction and personal wellbeing. Strong compatibility is a reliable indicator of effective career management and, in turn, a successful career. Signal two accounts for changes in a person's life as well as in the labour market. Sensitivity towards such changes accompanied by sufficient flexibility to adapt, is conducive to effective career management (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Kaplan 1995). Effective career management is an ongoing process of decision making intended to promote a successful career.

4.5 Shortcomings and strengths of graduate employability as a career management process

The career management process approach promotes pro-active career planning in a logical and rational manner and links the planning process to future employment outcomes. Such rational career planning does not account for graduates who are continuously confronted with economic, political and social challenges. Career planning and career building for students from unstable socio-economic and political environments are often linked to the survival needs of their families and/or availability of educational and financial opportunities. The link between pro-active career planning and future employment outcomes for such students are thus not as straightforward as suggested by research and the career management approach. In addition, the agentic focus of the approach suggests that the graduate's employability depends solely on his/her good or bad decisions in terms of career planning. Such a perspective places the responsibility of career success squarely on the shoulders of the individual and does not consider systemic or structural factors.

Despite the mentioned shortcomings, for this study the career management approach proved a useful lens for the analysis of graduate career paths, as it revealed possibilities for interventions by HEIs as well as how graduates can improve their own employability. A process view to graduate employability takes into account how graduates manage the transition into employment, and focuses on the interactional nature of educational and employment trajectories (Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015). This interaction provides scope for HEIs to support students to integrate into their education a focus on possible future careers, and in this manner ameliorate the effect of being unable to engage in pro-active career planning, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In addition, the career management approach provides a practical way to explain the concept of employability to non-experts such as students and parents. In a very practical way the importance of pro-active career thinking is thus emphasised. The advantage of this approach primarily lies in the applied relevance for a variety of stakeholders (policy makers, employers, students and parents) (Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015).

4.6 Methodology

4.6.1 Context and research approach

This study forms part of a larger research project which investigated the transition of 46 graduates from HE into first-time employment. Of the 46 graduates 31 were first-generations students (FGSs), in other words, students of whom none of the parents had completed tertiary education. The specification of FGSs is significant in the South African context where, due to the apartheid history, it can be assumed that the majority of students currently in the HE system are FGSs.

The graduates all graduated in 2010 with a diploma, an undergraduate or a postgraduate qualification from four universities¹ in SA, and entered the job market thereafter. The participants were purposively selected as first-time entrants to the labour market, and to include graduates from various faculties and qualification levels in order to gain an overview of a variety of graduates' transitions into first-time employment. The participants in the study were selected on the basis of their previous participation in a graduate destination survey (GDS) by a regional higher education consortium.²

The focus of this study is to explore the career management processes of the graduates during the first five years of their careers, and we did this by gathering qualitative data and employing an interpretive approach. Semi-structured individual interviews provided opportunities for the participants to express themselves and to relay experiences and events that shaped their careers, whereas the interpretive approach allowed us to describe, understand and interpret the management of the participants' career paths (Babbie and Mouton 2011).

4.6.2 Data collection and analysis

Interviews were used as an opportunity to explore how the graduates understood success and managed their careers towards the attainment thereof. As part of the semi-structured interviews conducted for the larger study, the graduates were asked how they understood success in the workplace as well as how their degree studies fed back into their jobs. Probes were used to encourage the participants to elaborate on their perspectives on success and on whether they considered themselves to be

successful in their careers. They were also encouraged to expand on the value of HE with regard to their careers. We asked them to suggest improvements or changes to the HE system that could have amplified the contribution of HE to their career paths.

The 46 interview transcripts were subjected to thematic content analysis, drawing on a set of codes that were developed during the larger study that explored the transition of graduates from HE into first-time employment. The credibility of the data analysis was supported by the development of the codes by both of us separately. The codes were revised in the light of the data (Leibowitz et al. 2012) and our theoretical approach to graduate employability from a career management perspective. The codes, used as subheadings for the findings in the next section, are: 1) career exploration, 2) career goals, 3) career strategies, 4) career appraisal and 5) career success. Interpretation and representation of data were enhanced through repeated readings of transcripts as well as several rounds of analysis.

4.7 Findings from a career management perspective

At the time of the research the participants had been working for approximately five years which allowed them to reflect retrospectively on their journeys.

4.7.1 Career exploration

Career exploration is an ongoing process which involves reflections on past career choices, and decisions about future career prospects. Ideally, career exploration should start when one considers tertiary education, and should continue throughout one's career. Five years into their careers, the participants were able to engage in reflective exploration which entails the ability to reflect on and accurately assess demonstrated behaviours and skills (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010). Their reflections revealed that they had entered HE without a clear picture of their future careers. Programme choices were determined by personal interests or experiences, as revealed by Joseph's³ (white, male, B Soc Sc) choice to study politics and economics, *'My family has always been very politically involved, so, it seems like a good thing to do. At the time I was also very interested in international politics.'* Their prior school performance or programme availability limited options for some, and they had to accept second or third programme choices in order to study.

This was specifically prevalent amongst the FGSs who were desperate to gain entry into HE as for them it represented employment and a better life. Although exceptions occurred, most participants entered HE without exploring programme or employability options and had at that stage not yet committed themselves to a specific career path. Lee's (white, female, M Sc) explanation in this regard is profound, *'I was going to get my degrees and then my plan never went further than that.'* Most participants did not consider where they were heading after graduation or whether their field of study would be conducive to securing employment.

The journey through HE inspired a few participants' exploration of the self and the environment. Joseph (white, male, B Soc Sc) indicated how his involvement in student politics opened up options for him, *'I had a fairly good idea of what I was heading at, in the right direction for what I wanted to do,'* while Pauline (white, female, LLB) familiarised herself with the law environment through engagement with her lecturers, *'I worked at [university name] for a female lecturer in the [department], she taught property law. And she was quite a good mentor and encouraging me to do and publish and write and things like that.'* Her narrative alluded to the promotion of awareness through the process of exploration, *'I sort of saw it as a sort of process where you learn what you like and you don't like throughout your experience.'* Both Joseph and Pauline were the third generation in their families attending HE. Their familiarity with the HE context was evident in their engagement with extra-curricular activities.

For many participants, however, the journey through HE was challenging and did not leave much space for career exploration. The notion of 'foreground' is useful to interpret these participants' experiences during HE. Skovsmose (2005) developed the notion of foreground to explicate learners' intentions for learning in mathematics. According to him a person's foreground is formed through possibilities, tendencies, obstructions, barriers, et cetera, as structured through social, economic, political and cultural parameters, and how a person experiences and interprets such parameters. For the participants, especially the FGSs, HE provided the possibility of employment, as Ntsu (black, male, B Tech IT, FGS) explained, *'You must go to study ... otherwise you won't get anything [employment].'* Yet, to realise the possibility they had to overcome academic, financial and social challenges; the university experience

became a survival game. Some even considered giving up along the way, as in John's (coloured, male, B Com, FGS) case, '*I did not have transport ... I couldn't afford certain books ... [but] I just had to push through.*' Despite the challenges these participants graduated successfully as they intended to. However, having to struggle to overcome a multitude of barriers, they did not engage in other HE activities or exploration processes, as indicated by Tanya (black, female, B Eng, FGS), '*And then I wasn't really involved with all the activities that were happening around the university, such maybe socialising a lot. I was really very absent, to be honest.*' It is noticeable that mostly the FGSs indicated that they did not partake in extra-curricular activities or in the exploration of future careers.

Most participants only engaged in career exploration when they had to apply for employment or when plans did not work out due to unforeseen challenges. In Kopano's (black, male, B Com, FGS) case he had planned a career as a chartered accountant but, '*the fact that I did my third year in two years already disqualified me.*' Without a proper plan, detours towards desired careers had to be taken. Consequently the search for employment was mostly done haphazardly, as by Mpho (black, male, B Tech Eng, FGS), '*you saw the post and then you just applied and then after applying, then you wait.*'

The career exploration process contributes to one's understanding of the perceived person-occupation fit and adaptability, and is an important resource for coping with career transitions (Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015). For some participants this notion of perceived person-occupation fit contributed to the choices they made about future careers. This is illustrated by Michelle's (white, female, LLD) example. Her dream of becoming a lawyer ended when she realised, '*I would never fit in and I said no, I wanted to stay in academia.*' Pauline (white, female, LLB) was able to explore all her options to ensure person-occupation fit, '*They [parents] encouraged self-initiation in whatever I wanted to do.*' But for most participants, career exploration and a choice of person-occupation fit was a luxury they could not afford since employment was necessary to survive, as alluded to by Tanya (black, female, B Eng, FGS), '*I really needed a job. I really needed to eat.*' To secure employment was so difficult that participants were willing to accept any work. Liezel (coloured, female, B Tech Food Tech, FGS) reflected, '*I asked him [a contact] isn't there maybe just a*

junior position, maybe just for a couple of hours. It doesn't have to be a permanent thing, maybe just a casual thing for me.' The responses above indicate that person-occupation fit did not determine the choice of employment for FGSs, but rather their socio-economic circumstances.

After five years in the labour market some participants' journeys up to the point of the interview had been a struggle. They were still employed in jobs that did not require a degree; it is noteworthy that all of them were FGSs. Rizqah's (coloured, female, B Com, FGS) reflection illustrates her disillusionment, *'it feel like I wasted four years of my life ... sometimes it makes me feel like I could've done something better during that time [HE studies].'* Others, like Mia (white, female, B Sc Speech Therapy), were in employment appropriate to their qualifications, but their careers did not meet their expectations, *'It's not really what I expected of my job.'*

Conversely some participants' careers were flourishing and they were considering taking steps to reach goals that had been set during the previous five years. This was revealed by Mark's (white, male, B Tech Surveying) observation, *'the next step is to get my PQS, professional quantity surveyor ... I'm obviously interested in making money and a career and I know quantity surveying is a tool for me to get there.'* Each participant's engagement with career exploration was unique and depended on both his/her personal agency and interpretation of his/her structural factors or foreground. Career exploration was not a once-off engagement but rather a continuous process which changed during the graduate journey.

4.7.2 Career goals

Career goal setting enables an individual to focus his/her efforts, and shapes behaviours and attitudes towards attaining those goals (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010; Greenhaus, Callanan, and Kaplan 1995). The participants entered HE with the perception that a HE qualification would provide employment, as Liezel (coloured, female, B Tech Food Tech, FGS) said, *'You thought you were going to walk into a job.'* Liezel's response reflects the beliefs of graduates in general about the value of HE. The first career goal thus entailed finding employment. For the participants with a professional degree - the doctors, nurses and accountants - this goal was attained through arranged internships. The rest of the participants revealed

that finding employment was *'a very difficult thing'* (Tanya – black, female, B Eng, FGS). Tanya experienced the process as *'horrible'* and said, *'at some point I wished I had failed [did not graduate].'*

Support to attain this first very important career goal came mostly from friends and families. The participants were explicit about the absence of support from HEIs in making the transition into employment. Kopano (black, male, B Com, FGS) said, *'my relationship with my university I can say ended when I finished my degree,'* while Jason (coloured, male, B Com, FGS) indicated, *'I actually went to the career centre and there wasn't much help.'* Walker and Fongwa 2016 point to the underuse of careers offices even if extensive services are available.

For some graduates the stress of securing employment was alleviated by their financial and social circumstances, but for most the process was *'frustrating'* (Rorisang) and *'demotivating'* (Kayla). After struggling to find appropriate employment Mpho (black, male, B Tech Eng, FGS) accepted a job as a cleaner. He revealed his frustration, *'you have a BTech and then you're a cleaner ... that was [an] insult ... I felt very down ... nearly getting to regret [studying] ... I resigned.'* Structural factors undoubtedly impacted graduates' experiences during their search for employment. During this time family support and networks became of increasing importance, and graduates with stronger support systems and social networks were at an advantage. In this sense, the historical inequalities are still reproduced in the labour market, and securing employment was not for all graduates the panacea that they had expected. The duration to securing employment varied between immediately upon graduating to more than two years.

In analysing the participants' goal setting processes and how their goals motivated and directed their behaviours we once again employed Skovsmose's (2005) notion of foreground. Employment opened up new possibilities to the participants; consequently their foregrounds changed and the interpretation thereof shaped their subsequent goals, signifying the temporal element of goal setting. Employment meant financial stability, and for many participants coming from backgrounds where they experienced financial hardship, financial stability became a career goal. This is illustrated by Ashlin's (coloured, female, B Com, FGS) account, *'I've been through quite a bit of times in my life when we didn't know where we were going to get*

money. Not for studying, but for living. You know, eating ... I work now for my own money.’ Such goals determined further career choices, as explained by Reece (coloured, male, ND Biotech, FGS) who was working as a food technologist but engaged in part-time studies:

‘I’ve studied a correspondence course, IT, through UNISA ... it can be beneficial ... maybe if I can do something like that [IT] one day ... but I’m not like really pushing it, because I’m actually looking for [financial] stability right now.’

Although goal setting is related to where an individual finds him/herself at a particular point in time, it is also linked to prior experiences and the interpretations thereof, as described by Reece (coloured, male, ND Biotech, FGS). His socio-economic circumstances prior to employment shaped his goal setting processes even when he was in employment.

Many participants’ interpretation of their foregrounds, which included possibilities for future employment, demonstrated an acute awareness of the relationship between their work life and their personal life, as reflected in Clifton’s (white, male, BA Hons PGD) and Leighton’s (Indian, male, MBChB, FGS) goals. Leighton was happy to work hard since, *‘for me contentment is being able to one day be my own boss. I know that I enjoy what I do, so, that’s already important. And being able to spend time with my family’*. Clifton’s goals revealed his thoughts on lifestyle preferences:

‘I’d like to be at [company’s name] for the next five to ten years ... I think I earn enough to keep myself happy. I’ve got my family and friends around. And I live a balanced, a balanced lifestyle. And I get to play my sport.’

Some participants were aware of specific career-related outcomes and shaped their goals towards such outcomes, as illustrated by Faith’s (black, female, B Curr, FGS) narrative, *‘I want to work at a community level. I’m doing ... it’s BTech in primary health care ... this program will see me working in the clinical facilities.’* Similarly, Rebecca (coloured, female, B Soc Sc Hons, FGS) alluded to her awareness of her career-related outcome, *‘I guess just the fact that for a very long time I’ve had an idea of how things would turn out in my life on a professional level.’* She directed her

goals towards attaining those outcomes. She engaged in active exploration of her environment in order *'to actively start looking for other employment ... I see myself in the public sector ... specifically parliament.'* Faith's and Rebecca's responses reflect their engagement with their personal agencies in setting goals. Both these participants' socio-economic circumstances could have inhibited the goals they set for themselves if they had not activated their agencies.

Although goal setting is central to the career management process not all participants engaged in the process to the same extent. After five years of employment some participants had a clear idea of where they were heading as in Hope's (coloured, female, B Soc Sc, FGS) case, *'my ultimate goal is to work overseas,'* while others had no clear career goals, as alluded to in Mia's (white, female, B Sc Speech Therapy) narrative, *'I like my job, but I definitely think that there's something else that I would like to do and the problem is I don't know what.'* For some participants goal setting was a deliberate and conscious process, as demonstrated by Jason's (coloured, male, B Com, FGS) reflection, *'I always knew ... my main goal was to get into the Reserve Bank.'* For others the process occurred more organically without deliberate thought, as in Tamlyn's (white, female, B Tech IT) case, *'I didn't necessarily sit down and say, okay, in five years this is where I want to be, this is what I want to be doing. It just sort of happened that way.'*

4.7.3 Career strategies

A career strategy is a conscious choice regarding the type of investment one is willing to make to reach certain career goals (Callanan 2006). As indicated above, the attainment of the participants' first career goal, namely to secure employment, occurred haphazardly without a specific strategy. *'I just applied in general ... I need a job ... I need to find work'* (Jason - coloured, male, B Com, FGS).

Once in employment, although not necessarily consciously, some participants did employ career strategies to attain specific goals. Callanan (2006) identifies seven major strategies that could contribute to the advancement of careers: 1) competence in one's present job, 2) enhancing work-related skills, 3) putting in extended hours, 4) developing new opportunities, 5) getting a mentor, 6) building one's image and

reputation, and 7) engaging in organizational politics. Evidence of employing several of these strategies was apparent from participants' narratives.

Clifton (white, male, BA Hons PGD) deliberately moved out of a '*dream job*' when he realised it would not ultimately benefit him ('developing new opportunities'). In Reece's (coloured, male, ND Biotech, FGS) case, although the goal of being in a financially secure position dictated his decision to remain in his current employment, he realised that he might want to consider other options at a later stage and invested in improving his computer skills ('enhancing work-related skills'). Lee (white, female, M Sc) was prepared to put in extended hours, '*it was like if I needed to work till sometime in the evening, I did, you know,*' while Liezel (coloured, female, B Tech Food Tech, FGS) went '*the extra mile, to do a little bit extra work.*' Chantelle (coloured, female, B Soc Sc, FGS) demonstrated her competence in her work by '*developing my own programs,*' while Anelisa (black, female, BA, FGS) took initiative to '*bring up things that would make the organisation or the company move forward*' ('building one's image and reputation').

Although the participants did not necessarily refer to these actions as 'strategies', nor necessarily linked them to a career management process, they did employ strategic actions to benefit their careers and to attain their goals. However, as indicated before, not everybody acted strategically to attain the goals they set for themselves. Jason (coloured, male, B Com, FGS) did not apply for posts in the banking sector even though his goal was to work for the Reserve Bank as he believed his academic record was not good enough. His reaction to his foreground was to limit the sector where he applied for employment. In reflection, he said that if he had been better informed during HE, he would have made different choices. Strategic career decisions are inextricably linked to career exploration and career goals, and are dependent on career appraisal during the career management process.

4.7.4 Career appraisal

Career appraisal depends, amongst other things, on feedback. Creed and Hughes (2013) point to the potential of feedback, as a result of asking guidance, to promote adaptability. They suggest that an employee who is willing to ask guidance would be more flexible and open-minded, and willing to modify goals and adapt his/her

strategies when necessary. During the first step into employment support and feedback for these participants came from families and friends. Once in employment, they received support and feedback, both formally and informally, from colleagues and peers.

Participants' narratives revealed relationships with mentors in their work environments which allowed them to approach the mentor for guidance, as in Abongile's (black, female, BA, FGS) case, '*[She] had an open door policy. So, whatever challenge that you come across, you just go and ask [for] assist[ance]*'. Sue (coloured, female, B Tech Surface Design) indicated how she depended on the feedback from her mentor to guide her career path, '*I'm still trying to figure out ... become a space planner or an interior designer ... I'm still going through the mentoring process.*'

Feedback can come from a variety of sources, including observation of the work environment (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010), as in Liezel's (coloured, female, B Tech Food Tech, FGS) example. She observed, '*There was no room to grow there. It's a small company, my salary would increase, but I would still be doing the same thing.*' She realised that the company would not provide her with sufficient opportunities to grow and reach her goals. She acted on this observation by exploring other opportunities where she would be able to grow.

A person can also serve as his/her own source of feedback (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010). Vuyiseka's (black, female, MSc, FGS) career goal was to become a company director. After a short period in the labour market she observed, '*I've seen what the director does as a job now, because I'm in the work environment. And I'm like, it's not really what I want to do.*' She was vigilant in detecting that her initial goal was not what she really wanted. At the time of the research, she said, '*I'm still trying to figure it out.*' This response, like those of others, reflects the iterative process between self-knowledge as part of career exploration and feedback as part of career appraisal as well as the development of the participant's self-knowledge during the career journey.

The participants' narratives reveal the negotiations of their career paths. The transition into employment was mostly complicated and frustrating. Once in

employment, each participant negotiated his/her career path by interpreting the possibilities and challenges experienced in his/her foreground at that time, while contemplating the past and the future. Later in career journeys, participants engaged more with career management processes, although they did not link their actions to career management. The result is a variety of career paths, of which some were logically and rationally planned, while others were more fragmented and inconsistent. Some participants regarded their career paths as being successful, while others considered themselves as still being on their way to success or even unsuccessful.

4.7.5 Successful careers

Career success is best assessed by the person him/herself in relation to his/her own particular criteria (Hall 2002). The main criteria for career success set out by the participants were to be happy and content, to experience financial stability and to be able to reach your goals. Career success in terms of happiness and contentment was expressed as, *'enjoy what you are doing'* (Pauline), *'having healthy relationships'* (Ashlin), *'a nice work environment'* (Andre) and *'one day be my own boss'* (Leighton).

Career success in terms of financial stability had different meanings to different participants. For Leighton (Indian, male, MBChB, FGS) financial stability implied *'a reasonable standard of living'* and *'being able to send my kids to good schools.'* Ashlin (coloured, female, B Com, FGS) referred to financial stability as being *'self-sufficient'*, while Phumza (black, female, B Tech Surveying, FGS) explained, *'I want to eat bread every morning when I go to school. Not to go and check what was the leftover food.'* The reflections on the meaning of success signify the relation between interpretations of current foreground to experiences in the participants' past.

Research positively connects activities such as setting career goals to career success (Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk 2010; Seibert 2006), and for some participants the attainment of such goals demonstrated their career success. Faith's (black, female, B Curr, FGS) goal was *'to achieve that level in your career ... I want to work at a community level.'* She embarked on postgraduate studies to attain her goal and she considered herself *'on the road'* to success.

Although many participants considered themselves to be successful according to their own criteria, there were those who considered themselves to be either en route to success or unsuccessful. At the time of the research five participants, after five years in the labour market, were still underemployed. Rizqah (coloured, female, B Com, FGS) reflected on her situation, *'My family, we're fine. We're not struggling or anything like that. But where my career is, no; not successful at all.'*

Even though the participants' reflections on career success revealed a variety of criteria, they did not directly link their career success to career management processes. There were, however, a few indications of awareness of person-occupation fit which research relates to effective career management and in turn career success (Seibert 2006). Participants described their awareness of the importance of job fit with phrases such as *'I can come to work and can say I enjoy my job'* (Chantelle - coloured, female, B Soc Sc, FGS) and *'Success comes from definitely enjoying what you do, completely enjoying what you do'* (Sue - coloured, female, B Tech Surface Design).

There were also indications of self-management behaviours, which Seibert (2006) connects with career success. For a few participants relocation within their current companies or across companies revealed self-management which contributed to successful career paths. Tamlyn (white, female, B Tech IT), for example, relocated a few times in the company where she started as an intern. She recalled how she applied self-management behaviours:

'And then a position opened up in another team to be the project manager on that team ... [I] put my hand up and said can you give me a shot? And then I kind of ran that team and now I'm running a lot more.'

During Hope's (coloured, female, B Soc Sc, FGS) career, she has moved between five companies. She deliberately planned the strategic relocations and reflected on her behaviour, *'I did move around quite a bit ... as you go about it, you get more and more experience.'* She was proud of her achievement and considered herself to be successful. Hope activated her agency to negotiate her career journey. Two of Hope's relocations were initiated through connections that she had established throughout her career. Creating social networks reveals self-management

behaviours and is associated with securing desirable jobs and possible promotions (Seibert 2006). Hope's professional networks contributed to her career success, as also indicated by Clifton (white, male, BA Hons PGD), *'Because I knew someone who knew someone there, kind of facilitated getting an opportunity and then starting there.'*

Although there was evidence of certain career management activities in the participants' narratives, career success was mostly interpreted according to the participants' foregrounds. Each participant interpreted his/her situation and possibilities in different ways and defined career success according to this interpretation. In the next section we discuss the participants' interpretation of their HE experiences as part of their foreground and how HE contributed to their career success.

4.8 The value of higher education in career success

Stakeholders from the labour market are outspoken about the skills gap amongst graduates, while debates on the role of HE in preparing graduates for the world of work are continuing (Nabi and Bagley 1998). Literature further points to graduates experiencing uncertainty upon graduation as they question the role of education for employability (Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015). The question to be asked in the context of this article is, "Do graduates consider HE to be valuable in attaining career success?"

A strong theme that emerged from the data is that HE is indispensable since a HE qualification will lead to employment. This does not necessarily mean that the participants regarded themselves as prepared for their career paths. Their perspective rather emanated from the belief that *'chances are high that I will always have a job'* (Kopano - black, male, B Com, FGS) and the realisation that *'with matric, where do you go?'* (Brandon - coloured, male, B Com PGD, FGS). They believed that HE would *'open the door for you'* (Kopano) and that they would *'earn well enough to have that comfortable life'* (Roland - coloured, male, B Com Hons, FGS). HE would give them *'that edge, something to fall back on'* (Mia - white, female, B Sc Speech Therapy).

Further probing revealed that the participants valued the contribution of HE towards their personal development. In Jason's (coloured, male, B Com, FGS) words, *'it developed me a lot as an individual in terms of challenges that I overcame.'* Roland (coloured, male, B Com Hons, FGS) shared his perspective with regard to his development, *'You gain knowledge of the world, what's going on around you and not only the content of studying'*, while Joseph (white, male, B Soc Sc) believed HE provides *'greater interconnectedness with your fellows and with the different kind of opportunities that exist.'*

Mention was made of specific skills that contributed to the participants' development. These included to *'know how to learn'* (Reuben), *'help you to deal with people'* (Agnes), *'learn communication skills'* (Ashlin), *'managing my time'* (Chad), and *'solving problems'* (Tanya). The participants considered HE as *'a space [that] allows you to foster a set of skills that you might not necessarily have if you didn't go to it [university].'* (Joseph - white, male, B Soc Sc). Some participants pointed to the value of extra-mural activities in acquiring such skills as in Joseph's case, *'I picked up [skills] through all the additional participation that I had at the university.'* However, silences about involvement in extra-curricular activities overshadowed the few inputs that referred to such participation.

Despite the positive feedback on the value of HE, the participants still considered the transition into employment as challenging. They indicated that they had felt unprepared for employment as highlighted in Pauline's (white, female, LLB) narrative, *'I mean you work hard on your degree, but I don't think it prepares you for what the world of work is like.'* Liezel (coloured, female, B Tech Food Tech, FGS) explained her experience, *'When you start working, you must implement that theory. And you don't really know how and where it fits in.'* Clifton (white, male, BA Hons PGD) confirmed Liezel's, Pauline's and others' perspectives, *'I thought I was prepared and then when you get there, you realise that there is kind of a gap, sort of a theoretical and practical gap.'* The participants felt particularly overwhelmed in the first month of employment; this was true for those following a professional degree as well. Leighton (Indian, male, MBChB, FGS), a medical doctor, said, *'it's a very steep learning curve'*, while Sibahle (black, female, B Curr, FGS), a nurse, indicated, *'I was running around ... I was not sure.'* They were unprepared for many of the practical

elements of work life, and suggested stronger connections between HE and the labour market, and more exposure to the world of work to address this. They overcame the gap between HE and employment through strong support structures in their work environment, as suggested by Carin (coloured, female, NHC Acc, FGS), *'My team leader back then helped [me] a lot.'*

4.9 Conclusions and recommendations

We explored how a group of graduates managed their careers, whether they considered themselves to be successful and whether they thought HE contributed to their success by considering their journeys from a career management perspective. The first step of a graduate's journey is to enter HE. The lack of consideration of employment opportunities in choosing a field of study was evident. Particularly FGSs, often coming from schools 'characterised by pockets of disaster' (Walker and Fongwa 2016, 18), felt that they lacked opportunities and information in preparing for the HE section of their journeys. Although non-first-generation students (those of whom at least one parent had completed tertiary education) generally have access to more information, it seems as if their exploration stops at the choice of institution and field of study and does not include employment opportunities. This is significant as employment outcomes are related to specific fields of study as well as knowledge about a certain field of study (Walker and Fongwa 2016). The first recommendation from our findings thus pertains to the responsibility of students to be well-informed and knowledgeable about what a specific field of study entails as well as the employment opportunities within specific fields.

This is of specific importance in the South African labour market (cf. 4.2) where in a subdued economy graduate unemployment is rising. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2016, 3) in SA is attempting to address the lack of career information with which students apply to HE through the establishment of a National Higher Education Information and Application Service (NHEIAS) with the aim of delivering a 'seamless service from school level [to HE] with appropriate learning pathways and assistance with career decisions ...'. This is however not up and running and the effectiveness of the initiative remains to be seen. Although the responsibility about choice of field of study and future career remains that of the student, other stakeholders (HE, employers) should join hands in supporting

students in making these critical choices, especially for FGSs with limited access to the necessary information.

During their HE studies some participants explored careers options, but for most HE was a survival game. The value of HE was primarily associated with a perception of guaranteed employment. Silences about specific career preparation and a focus on employability in HE were palpable. Participants alluded to experiences of 'running around', 'overwhelmed', 'depressed', 'difficult' and 'unprepared' when they started the search for employment and embarked on their careers. Our second recommendation therefore pertains to the incorporation of career management processes in HE curricula in an attempt to improve graduate employability.

One of the major problems highlighted in research with regard to filling vacancies is the quality of graduate applications and not necessarily the quality of the graduates. This view suggests that employability is associated with the graduate's management of his/her university-to-work transition (Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2015); this is corroborated by our findings. One of the biggest challenges for the graduates was making the transition into employment. By incorporating career management processes into HE curricula, graduates may reap benefits such as lower unemployment rates, reduced job-search times, better income levels and enhanced overall quality of life (Bridgstock 2009). Developing graduates who are well-prepared to make the transition into employment is crucial in volatile labour markets, and more particularly in South Africa where graduates are expected to contribute to the development of a more just society and equitable labour market (DHET 2013).

After five years in employment the participants' perspectives on their career success varied. Some considered themselves to be successful, some were on their way to a successful career, while others were frustrated and regarded themselves as unsuccessful. The participants had a mostly subjective view on career success and did not necessarily link career success to HE. Once in employment much of their career negotiations depended on individual agency and the interpretation of structural factors or foreground. The success of a graduate's journey thus depends on much more than HE's contribution to his/her development of employability. However, from our perspective, while acknowledging the responsibility of the graduate him/herself, we recommend a much more focused incorporation of career

management processes in HE, specifically for those graduates whose structural factors continuously limit their personal agency.

4.10 Notes

1. All four universities are public institutions of which one is a university of technology, while the others are traditional universities. Of the latter three, two are historically white universities.
2. The regional consortium is a section 21 company representing the four universities whose graduates participated in the research.
3. In reporting the data we anonymised participants by using pseudonyms for all first names. Verbatim quotations were translated from Afrikaans, where applicable, and filler sounds were deleted to enhance readability without changing the meaning. Identifiers indicating race, gender, qualification and whether a FGS are used to provide context to each participant's response when used in the findings.

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CHAPTER 5

Article 3: The role of community cultural wealth in the professional success of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds

Abstract: The capitals with which graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds enter higher education are often conceptualised as deficient and inadequate. Yet, a number of scholars have demonstrated how these students utilise their networks and resources to succeed in school and in higher education. Building on this work, this study applies Yosso's notion of community cultural wealth to explore how graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds negotiate pathways into employment and navigate their careers. Semi-structured interviews with thirty graduates from four universities in South Africa were conducted to obtain accounts of these journeys. Thematic analysis of the narratives demonstrates how the participants engaged with family, aspirational, resistant and social capital to find employment and build a successful career. This study emphasises that instead of perceiving graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds from a deficit point of view, the recognition of their resources and networks should form the basis of establishing appropriate measures to support their transition into employment.

Keywords: disadvantaged graduates; cultural capital; community cultural wealth; university-employment transition; employability

5.1 Introduction

The paper is set against the backdrop of the current debate on the graduate employability of graduates and rising graduate un- and underemployment rates. The literature on graduate employability reveals a tension between the increasing demand of the labour market for the 'production' of work-ready graduates by higher education (HE), and growing concerns about graduate un- and underemployment (Baldry 2015; Tomlinson 2012) coinciding with growth in student numbers.

In response to the need for knowledge workers, higher education institutions (HEIs) across the world endeavour to demonstrate to a variety of stakeholders (employers, parents, students) that they are producing employable graduates (Holmes 2015). Simultaneously, governments, parents and students are increasingly expressing concerns about the return on investment in HE (Teichler 2015). For graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds return on investment in HE is particularly pressing since they regard this investment as key to a better life for themselves and their families. Although some research indicates that the effects of social and cultural barriers to graduate success have largely dematerialized within five years after graduation (Edwards and Coates 2011), evidence to the contrary is emerging. Mok and Jiang (2016) identify family background and social resources as crucial determinants of an individual's employment in China, while in the United Kingdom, Britton and others (2016) found that family background continues to influence graduates' earnings long after graduation. In South Africa the strongest predictor of unemployment, according to Baldry (2015), is race, with socio-economic status the second strongest predictor. This disproves expectations that policies such as the Employment Equity Act (EEA) (DOL 2016) and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) (DTI 2016) would do away with racial inequities due to the legacy of apartheid, and bring about a more equitable situation in the South African labour market. This all raises questions around how graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds in SA, who are mostly black, coloured and Indian, make the transition from higher education into employment and what the factors are that enable such graduates to effectively make this transition.

In this study we explored these factors by advancing the work of scholars (Jayakumar, Vue and Allen 2013; Kapp et al. 2014; Marshall and Case 2010; Norodien-Fataar 2016; O'Shea 2015; Pérez Huber 2009) who explain how students from disadvantaged communities use networks and other resources in their families and communities in order to succeed in school, to access HE and to graduate successfully. Students from disadvantaged communities are often labelled as *not* traditional, *not* prepared and *not* privileged (O'Shea 2015; Smit 2012); hence their resources and networks are conceptualised as inadequate and deficient. The focus remains on 'what they do not have' instead of on 'what they have.' Yet, the studies cited above have found that they make sense of their so-called 'disadvantaged'

environments and use their social networks and resources to succeed in school and to enter HE. We proceed beyond these studies by showing how graduates from disadvantaged communities made the transition from HE into first-time employment and became successful by using their resources and networks, revealing that the employment of these resources in disadvantaged communities does support graduates from these communities in negotiating their career paths.

'Disadvantage' in this study was defined by using students' means of financial support during their HE studies and their parents' level of education as proxies. Financial support for these students included mainly the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS),¹ parent support and/or the student him/herself through part-time work. None of the students' parents had completed their secondary school education or been to university. All the participants therefore were first-generation students (FGSs), and coincidentally all were black, coloured and Indian² graduates. This is noteworthy since it indicates that the remnants of apartheid persist in disadvantaging black, coloured and Indian students. Furthermore, whereas students from lower socio-economic status are in the minority in HE in many countries (Devlin 2011), in South Africa they form the majority of the student population.

Instead of disregarding these students' resources and networks as insignificant in the HE context, we suggest that acknowledging their resources and networks could, firstly, unlock our understanding of their engagement with their accumulated resources and networks, and secondly, provide a basis from which HEIs can support students from disadvantaged backgrounds during their transition into employment. This is important since much effort is put into providing access to and facilitating success in HE for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Lewin and Mawoyo 2014), but very little is done to provide support during their transition into employment (Khan 2016).

Smit (2012) argues that HEIs need to value student diversity in terms of socio-economic status, language, and cultural and educational background and tap into the riches provided by the diverse student body. She argues for more nuanced research into student background as a suitable response to a more diverse student body. We propose that our study is a starting point in this regard since it draws attention to how HE could support graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds in

strengthening their resources and networks in order to facilitate the often difficult transition into employment, and in this way promote social justice and equity.

5.2 Cultural capital and community cultural wealth

For the purpose of the study we employed Bourdieu's (2006) notions of social and cultural capital and Yosso's (2005) conception of 'community cultural wealth' to elucidate how graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds negotiate their journeys into and within employment. Social capital is defined by Bourdieu (2006, 21) as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition'. Social capital is thus made up of connections and appreciation within a social group which depends in size and volume on past accumulated social capital (Bourdieu 2006). Due to the effect of social class, social capital can thus be seen as perpetuating social inequalities (Sullivan 2002).

Bourdieu's second notion of cultural capital (2006) is defined as the knowledge, skills, habits and values that one accumulates, mostly unconsciously, due to one's social status. The main sources of cultural capital are considered to be the family and society. Bourdieu (2006) regards differences in cultural capital as a possible reason for the unequal educational achievement of children from different social classes. By arguing that the type of cultural capital reproduced in middle-class societies is needed to function effectively in formal education, Bourdieu (2006) suggests that different class groups' cultural capital is unevenly recognised and valued in society. Sullivan's (2002) argument that the cultural capital inculcated in higher class homes enables higher class students to succeed in education, reinforces Bourdieu's contention that cultural capital is the most determining educational investment, and that ability and talent in education is a result of the accumulation of cultural capital in middle-class families and societies over time (Bourdieu 2006).

Yosso (2005) challenges the traditional Bourdieuean cultural capital theory as being too narrowly defined by white middle-class values, assets and resources. Hence, the accumulated values, assets and resources of communities outside the white middle class are seen as insignificant, especially in an educational context. Bourdieu does

not explain how the cultural and social capital and networks of poor people are employed in their educational processes (Jayakumar, Vue and Allen 2013; Norodien-Fataar 2016), and thus limits the effects of agency of the poor by suggesting that they are constrained by structural forces largely beyond their control (O'Shea 2015). To counteract this Yosso (2005) suggests an expansion of Bourdieu's perspective by introducing the notion of community cultural wealth (CCW).

CCW refers to an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts – or 'capitals' – possessed and utilised by people from disadvantaged communities. Yosso (2005, 79–80) identifies at least six capitals, namely aspirational ('the ability to maintain hope for the future'); navigational ('the ability of manoeuvring through social institutions'); social ('networks of people and community resources'); linguistic ('intellectual and social skills attained through communication'); familial ('cultural knowledge nurtured amongst *familia*'); and resistant ('knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality'), that together constitute the cultural wealth of people from disadvantaged communities. The capitals are neither mutually exclusive nor static, but rather dynamic processes of building upon one another (Yosso 2005). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds acquire various forms of capital over time and use these resources and networks to navigate the social structural contexts in which they live. They also use them to succeed in education.

Although Yosso's CCW framework, with its roots in critical race theory, has mostly been applied to students from ethnic minorities in their struggle for social and racial justice, it has the potential to unlock our understanding of under-represented or disadvantaged groups more broadly and has often been employed in various contexts within an interpretive paradigm (Norodien-Fataar 2016; O'Shea 2015; Pérez Huber 2009). The CCW framework can help us to acknowledge and understand the different forms of cultural wealth in communities and families, as well as the various types of capital that graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds activate in their transition from graduate to employee (Norodien-Fataar 2016; Yosso 2005).

Informed by the CCW framework, we explored how selected graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds used the resources and networks in their families and communities to enable them to secure employment and to function effectively in the

new work environment. In this paper we show how, in this process, they engaged with family, social, resistant and aspirational capital and highlight the factors that shaped their journeys into the workplace and their perspectives on success in this context. Instead of looking at graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds from a deficit point of view, we suggest that a better understanding of the value of these graduates' networks and resources could inform HEIs on how to strengthen their accumulated resources and networks and as such support them in their transition into employment.

5.3 Methodology

This paper draws on data from a study which considered the transition of 46 graduates into first-time employment. These students all graduated in 2010 with an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification from four universities³ in South Africa. For this paper, we focus on the transition from university to work of 30 of these graduates who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and ask, 'Which factors enable such graduates to effectively make this transition.' The participants were purposively selected according to the definition of 'disadvantaged' as mentioned in the introduction as well as on the basis of having successfully secured first-time employment.

During 2015 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants after they had been in the labour market for approximately five years. This meant that they were able to provide perspectives on their journeys into employment and the negotiation of their careers over a substantial period of time (Cranmer 2006). The participants were asked to describe how they had approached the process of securing employment, who had supported them in the process, how long it had taken to secure employment and how they had experienced the process. We further explored their perspectives on their success in their careers. Although the graduates' transitions into employment and negotiation of their careers were nuanced and idiosyncratic, for the purpose of this paper we focused on discerning and analysing general patterns in their experiences.

Analytic induction was used to uncover categories and themes in the set of interview data (Kapp et al. 2014). Similar ideas were clustered together as categories and

identified as themes. Themes captured key issues in the data that responded to the research question and indicated a level of patterned response or meaning in the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). The themes are presented within the CCW framework providing a theoretical lens to understand how these graduates engaged with their capitals during transition into employment and in negotiating careers.

In reporting the data we anonymised participants by using pseudonyms for all first names. Verbatim quotations were translated from Afrikaans, where applicable, and filler sounds were deleted to enhance readability without changing the meaning. Identifiers indicating race, gender and qualification are used to provide context to each participant's response when used in the findings.

5.4 Activating community cultural wealth during transition into employment

For most of this cohort, graduating from HE and having a qualification was a dream come true. Except for siblings in some cases, the participants were mostly the first in their families to graduate. Their qualifications gave them credibility and they believed it '*set them apart*' from those without qualifications. They believed that their education would '*open up doors*' and that they would '*always have a job*.' It is with these mind-sets that they approached the search for employment. In the analysis of the narratives we employed Yosso's notions of family, social and resistant capital to reveal how the participants' resources and networks were utilised in this process.

5.4.1 Family capital

Akin to how students from disadvantaged backgrounds used their family capital to open pathways into university as well as to navigate the HE environment (cf. Introduction), we argue that the participants in this study employed family-based capital to support them in their search for employment. Family capital refers to the 'cultural knowledges nurtured amongst families that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural institution' (Yosso 2005, 79). It is a type of cultural wealth which expands the concept of family to the extended family inclusive of uncles, aunts, grandparents and friends, and incorporates a commitment to community wellbeing (Yosso 2005). Parents and families were an integral part of the graduates' search for employment and provided instrumental and emotional support, while conversely family ties in some cases acted as a limiting factor.

Instrumental support

Parents and families often played an instrumental role in the job search process. The initial part of the graduates' search for employment included mostly internet searches for CV templates and possible job vacancies. Most of the participants used internet cafés and libraries for this purpose. Kopano's (black, male, B Com) reflection on his support structure demonstrates the concept of community wellbeing through the extended family:

'I used the internet. My sister, current sister of mine, my uncle's daughter, she's a nurse ... she give me money from time to time to go to library to do research, buy newspapers, make photocopies, send applications ...'

Kopano's 'sister' gave him money to support him. Roland's (coloured, male, B Com Hons) parents informed him about possible job opportunities at the company where they were employed: *'He ... and my mom used to [work there] ... he told us there's call centre jobs and then we checked online and then we just applied and we got in.'* The part-time position eventually became his permanent job. As in other examples, Roland did not critically evaluate the job opportunity. He took it as it provided an income. Jenel's (coloured, female, BA PGCE) father provided support by literally driving her around: *'I actually printed about 150 copies of my CV and my dad and I drove around and dropped off CVs everywhere.'*

Emotional support

In addition to active assistance, the participants reflected upon how their families, and specifically their parents, supported them emotionally, which in many cases helped them to persevere. Liezel's (coloured, female, B Tech Food Tech) reflection on her father's support reveals his concern about her future as a woman:

'I have two brothers, I'm the only girl. My father pushed me from day one to do something ... because normally ... in the area that you live in or the circumstance you find yourself in, women are always just seen as housewives, having children, staying at home, not having a career, depending on the husband. And if the husband leaves them, there's nothing ... So, my father probably had that in mind.'

Liezel's father's resistance against what happens 'normally' activated his emotional support for her and signifies the interactive nature of capitals. Vuyiseka (black, female, M Sc) recalled how her mother steadfastly believed in her: *'My mom's like, you know ... my children are not gonna not succeed.'* For Reece (coloured, male, ND Biotech), it was his elder brother who motivated him to strive to be more: *'I wouldn't say to be like him, but he [in]spired me to be like ... as successful as he is.'* The participants' parents and families cared for them in such a way that they realised they were 'not alone in dealing with their problems' (Yosso 2005, 79). This realisation helped them to endure in the face of challenges.

Limitations

In some cases family ties limited participants' scope regarding their applications for vacancies. Chantelle (coloured, female, B Soc Sc) restricted her applications to her hometown, since, *'[t]he only thing was that ... my mother's ... she likes to keep us all around. She doesn't want us far.'* John's (coloured, male, B Com) family ties similarly influenced his decisions. Through his choice of where to apply for employment, he contributed to the wellbeing of his family by not moving away while some family members were ill, *'because as I said, my grandmother and them were ill at the time. I could not afford working far away, but it was a motivation to work close by.'* Although we refer to this aspect of family ties as 'limiting', the participants did not regard it as such and did not challenge the 'limitation' placed on them. This points to the benefit derived from family capital outweighing any associated restrictions for the participants.

The families' support reflected the connection amongst family members during the job search process and minimised the experience of isolation for the participants (Yosso 2005). During this process most of the participants utilised social and community contacts to hear of vacancies or for support in the process of securing employment. The following section explores how the participants applied their social capital in their quest for employment.

5.4.2 Social capital

In 1995 Granovetter showed in his book, *Getting a Job*, that informal job search methods, for example through social networks, are very common and important. Ten

years later, Yosso (2005) explained that in disadvantaged communities social capital, that is, the networks of people, community resources, peers and other social contacts, provides instrumental and emotional support amongst community members in navigating society's institutions. This study shows how, in the quest for employment, social capital is activated.

Bonding ties: family and friends

The participants utilised their networks and contacts in different ways. Rizqah (coloured, female, B Com) worked at a friend's internet café when she could not find employment related to her field. She considered the job as a stepping-stone, *'just so that I had something to do'*. Kopano's (black, male, B Com) goal was to become a chartered accountant, but he could not enrol for an honours degree as he did not qualify, and also did not have the financial means to do so. He recalled, *'So, I stayed at home. Tried to look for a job. Then eventually my brother-in-law introduced me to this friend who started a consulting business.'* Through a family member's friend he eventually found a job which was more or less related to his field of study. John's (coloured, male, B Com) friend provided help by sharing her CV template with him since he could not afford the fee required for setting up a CV at the university's career centre: *'[F]urther I went through a friend who paid for it ... how she set up her CV, is how I set up mine.'*

Friends also proved to be an important source of information and support. Carin (coloured, female, NHC Acc) recalled:

'I, me and my friend, we always sat together in class and then she was like, she has someone that knows someone that works for [company name]. Took a chance and I gave them my CV and then I got an interview and then I started as a temp.'

Carin accepted help from her friend to acquire a job even though it was a temporary position, because the two months at home searching for employment was the *'worst time.'* The participants' social circles primarily consisted of family and friends. Granovetter (1973) characterised connections in such circles as strong ties, and referred to them as bonding ties. Within these social circles the participants shared

similar information (Andriani 2013) and relied on the information to find suitable employment.

Bridges: connections outside of family and friends

Andriani (2013) posits that individuals with different types of connections, in other words not only within circles of family and friends, can count on a more differentiated social reward. Ties between different social circles are referred to as bridges – without bridges the circles will be independent. Bridges between one's own social circle and other circles are needed to access 'outside' information. Granovetter (1973, 1360) characterised this combination of ties as the 'strength of weak ties'. In a few cases, participants utilised information from circles outside their communities. Hope's (coloured, female, B Soc Sc) narrative revealed such a bridge. She remained in contact with previous employers and that connection proved to be valuable. She recalled, *'Again somebody that I knew at [company name] contacted me and said there's a great job for [me], and I took it.'* Rebecca (coloured, female, B Soc Sc Hons) similarly built up bridges which, she believed, would benefit her career: *'I do have a good employment record so far that would enable getting into the public sector. I made a good number of connections.'* The combination of bonding and bridging ties was useful to both Hope and Rebecca as it gave them access to more information. However, most participants did not experience the benefits of such connections since, as Bourdieu (2006) suggests, the size and volume of their social capital was limited to family and friends.

The participants' social capital contributed to their finding employment in at least three ways: by providing a job opportunity, by referring them to a contact who may have a job opportunity, or by merely calling attention to an available vacancy. In a few cases, hope was demonstrated by participants' reactions to perceived limitations, a form of what Yosso (2005) calls 'resistant capital'.

5.4.3 Resistant capital

Yosso (2005, 80) defines resistant capital as those knowledges and skills which have developed due to 'resistance to subordination', specifically in the context of people of colour resisting experiences of racism. In this study, similar to O'Shea's (2005) use of the term, 'resistant capital' is conceptualised as resistance to the

status quo. O'Shea (2005) points out how this resistance can act as a powerful motivator for engaging and persevering in HE. We argue that this is also the case for these participants' transition into employment.

Resistance against disadvantaged background

Rebecca (coloured, female, B Soc Sc Hons) resisted her status quo through silences in her narrative about being from a disadvantaged background. The only reference to being disadvantaged was the financial aid (NSFAS) she received during her studies (cf. Note 1). She resisted her perceived 'disadvantage' with behaviours that would result in success. Since her school days she has had a vision of what she wanted to achieve: *'I just think it's always been instilled in me ever since ... well, my first recollection is in high school. I just had a desire to push myself and do the best that I could be.'* Rebecca indicated that she was never concerned about not being able to secure employment. She said, *'I think the fact that I remained focused and I had a vision ... of where the degree would take me, enabled that.'* She went about securing employment in a rather unorthodox manner by identifying a company where she wanted to work and contacting them. Although no vacancies were advertised, she was employed *'because of my interest in getting in. I was quite persuasive.'*

Similar examples of resistance were reflected in the narratives of other participants. Rizqah (coloured, female, B Com), whose parents worked hard to enable her to finish school, was dissatisfied with her HE experience and struggled to find appropriate employment. Her parents' efforts to enable her to go to school and university motivated her to complete her degree and find employment. She remarked, *'I didn't want to be that person who didn't study after school, sitting at home unemployed.'* Phumza (black, female, B Tech Surveying) resisted the limitations imposed by her home circumstances. She remembered how difficult her school years were and how she often went to school hungry and claimed:

'I cannot grow up in this kind of lifestyle and then at the end of the day my children, if I have children in the future, allow them to go through the same situation. I want to break away from this circumstances. I want one day to drive a car.'

The interviews indicated that the participants were not defeated by their backgrounds, but drew upon their existing capitals to support their transition into employment. They continued using their capitals in innovative ways to negotiate their careers en route to success. The evidence of resistance reported above reflects aspirations to dream of possibilities beyond current reality. Yosso (2005) refers to this as 'aspirational capital'. Aspirational capital was mainly employed by the participants to negotiate their career paths.

5.5 Employing community cultural wealth in negotiating careers

In their transition from HE to employment the participants utilized family, social and resistant capital to facilitate their journeys. Some were employed in their 'dream jobs', while others considered their current positions as stepping-stones towards something better. Featuring strongly in the participants' narratives was the theme of continuous reflection about career paths and what they aspired for. In the following section, we explore how the participants negotiated their careers, employing both aspirational and family capital in the process.

5.5.1 Aspirational capital

Aspirational capital provides the basis for a culture of possibilities (Jayakumar, Vue and Allen 2013). This form of cultural wealth enables an individual to remain positive about the future even when confronted with real or perceived challenges. Yosso (2005) describes how such resilience was evident in the way that people of colour allowed themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond present circumstances. In our study aspirational capital was evident in participants' narratives on their dreams and hope regardless of challenges and the reality of struggling to secure appropriate employment. This aspirational capital played out in a variety of ways for the participants. Next, we explore how the participants engaged with aspirational capital to negotiate their careers, to define and assess their own success and to resist careers paths that did not work out.

Aspiration informs negotiation of careers towards success

At the age of fourteen Faith (black, female, B Curr) had an experience which informed her aspirations in terms of a career. She reflected on that experience:

'I went with my mother to one of the clinics there in Port Elizabeth in New Brighton. And I was not happy [with] the way she was treated ... I thought to myself, if I can one day get into medicine field, I don't want to treat people like that.'

Initially, Faith dreamt of becoming a medical doctor, but she had to adjust her aspirations due to poor school results (cf. Norodien-Fataar 2016). She settled for nursing, while still believing that she could make a difference. At the time of the research, she was working as a registered nurse and was still studying. She explained, *'I'm doing ... it's BTech in primary health care. This programme will see me working in the clinical facilities ...'* Faith's personal experience provided an impetus to dream of becoming a nurse. She succeeded in doing so, but still aspired for more. Success for her is to reach a level in one's career where one is content. That level for her is community health. She considered herself to be on the road to success:

'Unfortunately being like in health, like learning never stops. It's a lifelong learning ... in order for you to continually be on the ball, you have to adapt yourself. That's why I say I'm on the road.'

Kopano (black, male, B Com) did not grow up with his parents and only met his biological father later in his life. His circumstances motivated him to dream about becoming a chartered accountant, as he explained:

'I didn't know him [my father] for the most part of my life. I didn't know his name, I didn't know where he was from ... I wasn't raised by my mother. I was raised by my uncle and my aunt ... that situation already, was for me a motivation. I needed to study. At least to change something in the family. And I was the first one in my family, in my previous family to go to varsity. So, those factors and I come from a small town. There isn't a lot of graduates. That was another thing. And the fact that I wanted to become a chartered accountant.'

At the time of the research, Kopano was completing his articles and honours degree and he was employed by the Auditor General. He too considered himself to be on his way to success since success to him was to effect change, specifically in the

community where he grew up. He explained, *'[T]here's a lot of things that I still want to do'*, and continued, *'I would like to one day have a bursary fund.'*

Similar to Faith and Kopano, many other participants' backgrounds motivated them to aspire towards a career that would not only change their own lives but would also enable them to effect change. Their narratives showed that they nurtured the culture of possibilities by recognizing their ability to disrupt the connection between their families' occupational status and their own future (Yosso 2005). Their aspirations allowed for the possibility of breaking such links not only in their families, but also in the communities from which they came.

Aspiration informs defining and assessing success

For some participants, success entailed being happy and content. This outlook was associated with maintaining both financial security and family relationships as well as reaching one's goals. For them, being successful went hand in hand with accessing their aspirational capital. Roland (black, male, B Com Hons) explained how his dreams and hopes were related to experiencing financial stability:

'Success I would define as being happy. Being happy and being free ... I know it sounds fluffy and out there, but with that, I think you need to be financially stable. You don't need to earn the most money in the world, but, when you look at what you earn and compared to your expense, I think you can be comfortable. So, managing your expenses is quite important. You can have success in that as well, if you become debt free. That is part of being, or I would say part of my success.'

In these cases participants' backgrounds acted as both a catalyst and a motivator to aspire towards a life where they were not continuously constrained financially. Leighton's (Indian, male, MBChB) and Thabang's (black, male, B Ed) narratives revealed how their aspirations included their dreams for their families. Leighton dreamed of *'being able to send your children to good schools'* and *'having good quality family time'* and he worked hard towards achieving these goals. At the time of the interview he was specialising in nephrology. He explained his decisions regarding his career path:

‘And so why I think I just wanted to specialise ... you need to have a plan for where you want to be in life, you know, down the line ... basically short-term sacrifice for long-term gain.’

Thabang aspired to become an academic: *‘So, I only see myself successful academically if I become an academic instead of a teacher.’* He was teaching at a college and had enrolled to study towards an honours degree on a part-time basis, but struggled and had to suspend his studies. Thabang was the only one in his family who was employed and he had the responsibility of caring for his family. Those realities shaped his aspirations:

‘When I sit down [and] look at my financial constraint ... okay, at this time the one I need mostly is the finance rather than the academics. I found that now is not the right time, the perfect timing. Next year maybe when I feel I can work around my timetable, even if it means I must stop working as a part-time, it’s fine.’

Aspirations endured career failures

Some participants’ career paths did not play out as they had planned. Kayla (coloured, female, MA), Carin (coloured, female, NHC Acc) and Rizqah (coloured, female, B Com) were underemployed, and although they had permanent positions, they aspired towards employment related to their fields of study. *‘At least something in finance,’* Rizqah exclaimed. They were frustrated, but despite the reality of struggling for five years to secure more appropriate employment, they remained hopeful and continued to apply for posts: *‘I’ve been applying for jobs every week to try and get into my field’* (Rizqah).

Brandon (coloured, male, B Com PGD) and John (coloured, male, B Com) both had contract posts. They aspired towards permanent posts but their circumstances had shaped their aspirations differently. Brandon accepted work that was not related to his qualifications because, *‘I was desperate for work, so ... I had a child three months ago.’* He continued, *‘I just need to become permanent.’* John worked as a cashier at a retail store after not being able to secure employment related to his field. He did not want to remain a cashier:

'Eventually, I just started applying for any post. It wasn't about being in HR [human resources] anymore. I just applied ... I just needed a permanent post, because I can't be in retail.'

Although he became despondent and felt discouraged, his aspirational capital enabled him to keep on hoping against hope. He eventually ended up in a human resource contract post and was still aspiring towards permanency at the time of the interview.

Success did not mean the same thing for everyone; yet, in all cases the participants' perspectives of what success entails shaped their negotiation of their careers and aspirations for the future. Often their notions of success were related to their relationships with their families, and while navigating their career paths, they invested in their family networks by caring for their families financially and emotionally.

5.5.2 Family capital

While thinking about their careers and where they wanted to be in five years' time, the participants were also conscious of the wellbeing of their families and communities.

Wellbeing of family

Chantelle (coloured, female, B Soc Sc) realised that while her parents both were pensioners, she *'want[ed] to be able to look after [them]'*. This realisation motivated her to work hard:

'If necessary even, I want to be able to help them ... To make it better for them as well. Because, currently now I'm back at home and I'm still staying at home with them. I make sure that I don't need to at the end of the month come to them. I rather say to them here, this is yours.'

When describing his career path as successful Anele (black, male, B Tech Eng) mentioned that, *'be[ing] able to take care of my family which is my unemployed mother and yeah, my siblings'* contributed to his experience of success.

Wellbeing of community

For the participants, ‘family’ referred to immediate family, but also included people in the community (Yosso 2005), as revealed in Kopano’s (black, male, B Com) engagement with family capital. His reflection on his career path included a dream of engaging with the community’s school children. His dream arose from an awareness of a lack of information about HE in the community. Thus, he ‘modelled lessons of caring, coping and providing’ (Yosso 2005, 79). Kopano described his dream as follows:

‘I was tutoring accounting students. And for me it was shocking to ask the matriculants, ‘What do you want to do next year?’ and they don’t know. That for me is shocking. That said to me the lack of information ... and it’s not just to them that lack of information. Maybe the teachers as well lack information, maybe the parents as well, the community as a whole. So ... that’s one of the factors that you need to stimulate in one to achieve something. And then when I have that something, I want to use it and get as much support as possible to ... to share information.’

The participants’ connections to their families and communities were strengthened by their willingness to share resources for the wellbeing of the community. The narratives reveal how the participants gave back to their families and communities and provide examples of how a sense of community was nurtured amongst families and communities.

5.6 Conclusions and recommendations

In this article we explored the transition into employment as well as the negotiation of early careers of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds. The participants in this study were selected on the basis that they succeeded in graduating and in securing first-time employment. Our focus was to understand how they obtained their first jobs and made the transition into employment. Our analysis showed how the participants engaged with their various capitals – or community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005) – during the different phases of making the transition into employment. Family and friends were highlighted as the most important support structures and constituted the graduates’ social networks that were used extensively. The reliance on family

support, resistance to having the same type of life as their families had, and as a result of the resistance, an aspiration for a better life was apparent. These capitals inspired the participants to work hard and persevere. They engaged with the cultural wealth available to them, secured employment and thought about their future careers, much like they did to succeed in school and HE.

The issue of personal agency was evident in the way and extent to which participants engaged with capitals. Choices made and reactions to external factors were unique for each participant. Some participants allowed their capitals to limit them to a certain extent, while others were inspired by their capitals to strive for more. The participants' capitals supported their transitions into employment, but their engagement was informed by each participant's personal agency.

By acknowledging the activation of capitals as the factor that enabled the graduates to make the transition into employment, we have answered our research question. However, to stop here would be to oversimplify a very complex issue. From the narratives of the participants it was clear that, although they managed to secure jobs and retain a degree of optimism, the journeys were difficult and complex. Their challenges, which are corroborated by literature (Baldry 2015; CHEC 2013), related to the struggle and duration to find employment as well as the type of employment secured. One participant took more than two years to secure a job, while others were employed on and off in contract posts. After five years in the labour market six of the participants were still underemployed; two in contract posts; while one was unemployed.

Interestingly enough, none of the participants mentioned any benefits they might have experienced with regard to employment policies in support of racial equity. The challenges they experienced suggest that the policies are not succeeding in supporting these graduates to make an easier transition into employment. Bridgstock (2009) has noted that graduates struggle to find employment due to the quality of their applications and not necessarily the quality of the graduates themselves. The possibility that the quality of the applications of graduates' from disadvantaged backgrounds disqualify them even before they can be considered for a job and thus cannot reap the benefits of EEA or BEE policies needs to be considered, and further research into this aspect may provide useful insights.

How should we then interpret these complexities? Although Yosso's theory explicates the graduates' engagement with their capitals to secure employment, it does not provide insight into the challenges experienced by the participants along the way. Despite much effort being put into providing access to HE for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, support in HE for these students to graduate successfully as well as employment equity policies these graduates still get the short end of the stick. Bourdieu's notion that different class groups' capitals are unevenly valued could provide some explanation of the fact that race and class are still the primary predictors of employment in SA (Baldry 2015). Although the participants' social networks did support them in finding work, the size and the level of influence of their networks limited the type of jobs they were exposed to. With the exception of a few participants, most did not expand and develop their networks during HE. In fact, there are significant silences in the participants' narratives about support from HE in the transition into employment.

We can conclude that very little is done from the side of HE to support graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds in the transition into employment; this in effect diminishes the positive effects of a university education, and consequently reproduces social inequality. We suggest that a recognition of the capitals which enabled these graduates to be successful in their careers could provide universities with a basis of establishing appropriate measures to support these graduates' transition into employment. Morley (2001) connects graduate employability to the strength of a graduate's accumulated resources and networks. Hence, we propose dedicated support for the transition into employment specifically for students from disadvantaged backgrounds by recognising their resources and capabilities, and by foregrounding their agency and resilience. Instead of focusing on the deficits of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, HE should focus on the strong capitals from which they can draw (Pérez Huber 2009) and promote the further accumulation of those capitals (Jayakumar, Vue and Allen 2013). In a competitive labour market where graduates' families increasingly tend to mobilise social resources to help find their children employment (Mok and Jiang 2016), the promotion of social capital for graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds is crucial.

By pointing towards HE's responsibility with regard to the support of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, we do not imply that these graduates' challenges will disappear. We acknowledge the structural constraints such as a volatile labour market, and the importance of personal agency during the graduate's journey into and in employment. However, by building on 'what they have' instead of focusing on 'what they do not have', HE can enhance these graduates' self-confidence and provide them with appropriate guidance for the transition into employment (Mitchell et al. 2015). A graduate should not be considered successful at the point of graduation, but rather at the point of being employed. In accordance, HEIs should rethink their success criteria to include not only graduation rates but also graduate employment rates, particularly for graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, and be more pro-active and innovative in 'going that extra mile' with the graduate up to the point where he or she is appropriately employed.

5.7 Notes

1. Students with an annual household income of R120 000 (~ \$ 8571/ ~ £ 643) or less are eligible for the National Student Financial Aid (NSFAS).
2. In this study I use the term black to refer to black African people, white to refer to white Caucasian people, Indian to refer to Indian people and coloured to refer to people of mixed race. This is in accordance with the South African government classification of races namely: black African (B), Indian (I), white Caucasian (W), and Coloured (C) (person of mixed race).
3. All four universities are public institutions of which one is a university of technology, while the others are traditional universities. Of the three traditional universities, two are historically white institutions.

5.8 References

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

At the end of this study it is fitting for me to reflect on my research journey up to this point. My research interest is student success. This interest followed from my position as a learning facilitator in an access programme at SU and led to a master's study about the experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds at SU. Through the master's study I developed an understanding of how students from disadvantaged backgrounds negotiate the HE context. This understanding led to the next question, 'What happens to students after graduation?' During the process of formulating a proposal to continue with a doctoral study I was introduced to the notion of graduate employability through the *Pathways from university to work: a graduation destination survey of the 2010 cohort of graduates from the Western Cape Universities* (CHEC 2013) report.

The main purpose of the graduate destination survey (GDS) was to determine levels of graduate employment and unemployment of graduates from the four universities in the Western Cape, and to develop an understanding of the various pathways they took from HE to work. Seven pathways were identified namely, 1) employed graduates who have entered the labour market for the first time in 2010, 2) employed graduates who were employed prior to studying for the qualification they acquired in 2010, 3) self-employed, 4) unemployed graduates, 5) graduates who continued their HE studies after attaining a qualification in 2010, 6) graduates employed in the informal sector and 7) unemployed graduates not looking for work, for example, home makers and care givers. The survey results provided insight into the Western Cape graduate labour market across all qualification levels in the form of data on quality and satisfaction levels, university performance, graduate destinations and employability. The Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) indicated that there was a need for deeper exploration of the different pathways through qualitative studies. Keeping in mind my earlier question, 'What happens to students after graduation?', exploring the pathways of first-time entrants into the labour market was a natural choice. In this study my research horizons broadened to include the

experiences of not only graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, but of all graduates. This study, *From graduate to employee: exploring the journeys of first-time entrants into the labour market*, builds on the CHEC GDS, by focusing on one of the seven pathways.

I embarked on a three year journey exploring the transitions of graduates into first-time employment. My journey involved several drafts of proposals while I was figuring out what the concept 'graduate employability' entails; my journey also included 'bundu-bashing' through four HE institutions' ethical clearance and institutional permission processes which were complex enough to put off any researcher from trans-institutional research; but mostly my journey was about my interaction with the 46 participants. It was not easy to secure 46 appointments across Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria. Each appointment required travelling to the location, searching for the agreed venue and hoping that the participant will turn up. Once the interview started, however, all the external factors receded and I immersed myself into the participants' experiences. Some participants were very expressive and spoke for an hour, while others were more reserved and answered only what I asked. Sometimes we laughed together about funny incidents along the way and sometimes there were sad silences as a participant reflected on hardships on his/her journey thus far.

During this research journey, and specifically during the data collection phase, I was sensitized to stories and experiences of graduates making the transition into employment. I spoke to many graduates, in addition to the participants, to broaden my perspectives about the graduate journey. One such encounter completely changed my outlook. One of my former students graduated during the time of my research. She worked hard during her years of study, and had to overcome a multitude of challenges in order to graduate. I attended her graduation and, as is the convention, took photos and celebrated with her after the ceremony. Of course I was interested in her plans for the future. I was shocked to learn that she did not receive her degree certificate or academic results on graduation day. She only received a bill for outstanding fees. The implication was that she could not apply for any graduate employment. I am not debating the practice by HEIs of holding back the academic results of students who are in arrears, but the implications of this practice for, as I

now realise, thousands of graduates with outstanding fees need serious consideration and deliberation. In the South African context where we are still trying to redress the injustices of the past, many students from disadvantaged backgrounds have similar experiences, whereas they are the students who are in dire need of entering the labour market to break the cycle of poverty in which they and their families are trapped.

So, I continued my research journey while pondering these issues. I became acutely aware of my responsibility as a researcher to shed more light on this reality. Whereas my initial aim was to understand graduates' experiences during their transition into employment, my scope expanded to a need to speak out on behalf of these graduates who are left to fend for themselves. I realised that Yosso's (2005) CCW, which I employed in a mostly interpretive fashion, can amplify my voice on behalf of these graduates in an emancipatory fashion. Moreover I argue that both the graduate identity and career management approaches to graduate employability can be used to emancipate graduates through the explication of their complex journeys. I will come back to this in the conclusion.

6.2 The substantive focus of the study

Graduate employability in a changing labour market and the role of HE in graduate employability are topics of conversation and contestation amongst various stakeholders (governments, academics, employers, parents, students). At the end of this study I am acutely aware of the multitude of perspectives on the role and purpose of HE (Barnett 2004; Blessinger 2015b; Hanson 2014; Teichler 2015), and specifically within the context of this study, the role of HE with regard to graduate employability (Barrie 2012; Stiwne & Alves 2010; Yorke & Harvey 2005). Many academics resist a neo-liberal approach of commodifying knowledge and turning universities into 'a sausage machine for lawyers, accountants, MBAs and others deemed economically necessary for the economy' (Everatt 2016:1). On the other hand, the need for graduates with specific skills and training is reiterated by employers and policy-makers. Whichever perspective one holds, what cannot be denied is that graduate employability 'sits at the heart of contemporary considerations of the nature and purpose of higher education and its relationship to society and the economy' (Tomlinson & Holmes 2016:1).

In a recent report (McCowan 2016) on the positioning of universities in relation to employability and development in Africa, HE is seen as playing a pivotal role in development at all levels. The role of HE in fostering high level research and technological capacity in the knowledge economy is recognised, but producing professionals who will play leading roles in the provision of health, education, public administration and more, is highlighted as fundamental. Furthermore, the impact of HE is not restricted to those who enter HE and complete a qualification, but could stretch much further to change communities. This is particularly pertinent in SA where, after 22 years of being a democratic society, the Gini coefficient ranges between 0.66 to 0.70 making the country one of the most unequal in the world. Persistent inequality has led to much turmoil and discontent, and in my opinion, is now acutely evident in the current student protests labelled the #FeesMustFall movement. I contend that student demonstrations and demands for free higher education speak to a need that goes beyond education. It is about improving lives. Students want to enter HE because, for most students and their parents, HE equates getting a good job and a quality life. Media headlines fuel this perspective (Jobbins 2015; Supiano 2015). The core of the issue is therefore graduate employability, and finding employment in a changed labour market.

In Chapter one, as well as in Articles one and two, I painted a picture of the changed labour market in which the graduates have to function. The labour market is informed by a post-industrialised knowledge-driven economy in which the need for work-ready graduates with specific skills is emphasised. Amongst these skills is the ability to adapt to continuous fluctuations in the market and a willingness to be a lifelong learner (Tomlinson 2012). HE is thus required to deliver employable graduates, and in most countries, as in SA, the need for economic growth and social wellbeing led governments to apply additional pressure on HE to do so (Blessinger 2015b).

In Chapter one and Article one, I also explicated the response of HE to this pressure. Although most academics do not concede to a narrow neo-liberal view of HE as simply having to produce employable graduates (Tynjälä, Välimaa & Sarja 2003), most HEIs globally have incorporated the preparation of employable graduates as a manifest part of their purpose (BIS 2011; Griesel & Parker 2009). In SA it seems as if the incorporation of employability as focus of HE is mainly on a policy level (CHE

2014, DHET 2013; DST 2007; NPC 2011), and little is done at the institutional level. Recent research by Walker and Fongwa (2016) highlights employability initiatives by some HEIs in SA, but these initiatives, which vary in range and effectiveness, speak of ‘pockets’ of focus on graduate employability rather than a holistic, inclusive incorporation of graduate employability into the role of HE as a whole.

In SA much is done to widen access to HE for previously underserved groups. Overall student numbers have increased by 23 per cent from 2008 to 2013 with the black student numbers in particular increasing with 34 per cent (CHE 2013). In addition, many interventions are in place to support previously underserved and historically disadvantaged students to graduate successfully (DHET 2013). Hence, school learners are supported to become students; students are supported to become graduates, but who supports graduates to become employees? Who supports graduates in making the transition into first-time employment – a transition which is considered one of the most important life phases? What happens to graduates aiming for employment after graduation?

Most research attempting to answer these questions uses the number of graduates who secure full-time graduate jobs within six months of graduation as an indicator of graduate employability (Bridgstock 2009; Dacre Pool et al. 2014). This postulation is problematic since ‘employability’ is then conflated with ‘employment’. The assumption further lacks validity since firstly, many graduates take longer than six months to secure appropriate employment (Dacre Pool et al. 2014), and secondly, factors such as the status of the HE institution attended, the mode of study, student location and mobility, subject of study, previous work experience, age, ethnicity, gender and social class, all of which influence the employment process, are not acknowledged (Harvey 2001). There is a paucity of research explaining the experiences of graduates during the transition into employment and the negotiation of their career paths (Mourshed et al. 2013; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios 2015; Teichler 1999). This study contributes to the body of knowledge in this field by exploring the journeys of 46 graduates in their transition from graduate to first-time employment. The research is phronetic as the analysis of the graduates’ journeys expounded the complexities involved in these transitions, explicated the factors that

shape these journeys and suggest practical action to address the issues at hand based on sound theory (Tomlinson & Holmes 2016).

Since the graduates all graduated in 2010, they had the benefit of hindsight in reflecting on their career journeys after being in the labour market for approximately five years. The exploration of their journeys was guided by the main research question:

‘What were the experiences of first-time entrants into the labour market during their transition from graduate to employee?’

Four sub-questions informed the main research question namely:

1. What strategies did these students employ at university in order to graduate successfully?
2. What strategies did these students employ to secure employment?
3. How is success in the workplace understood by these graduates?
4. How, according to these students, did their degree studies feed back into their jobs?

As discussed in Chapter one, the research was conducted according to an interpretive qualitative approach. The collected data were analysed with three different theoretical ‘lenses’ and presented as three articles. In the next three sections, I give an overview of the three articles and explicate how they each contributed to answering the research questions.

6.3 Article 1: From graduate to employee: exploring students’ transition from higher education into employment

In this article I employed Holmes’s (2000, 2015) graduate identity approach to employability as a lens to analyse the data. A first stage of analysis, a thematic analysis, revealed the identity formations of the participants during four phases in the journey into employment namely 1) entry into HE, 2) experiences during HE, 3) transition into employment, and 4) negotiating employment. An understanding of the graduates’ identity formation functioned as the background to the interpretation of

graduates' trajectories which were mapped during the second stage of the data analysis.

The data analysis, as described above, enabled me to start detailing a picture as a representation of the experiences of the participants during their transition from HE into employment. The focus was on the first two sub-questions. In regard to the strategies the students employed to graduate successfully from HE, I considered their perspectives on HE and programme choices when they entered HE, as well as their experiences during HE. At the point when the participants entered HE most of them revealed a 'diffused' career identity (Marcia 1966). They revealed how important they considered HE, but did not necessarily link their programme choices at that point to a future career. Factors such as choice and/or availability of school subjects, achievement in school subjects, personal experiences and their perspectives of their own personalities played a bigger role than possible careers. FGSs in particular were limited in terms of choice of subjects, choice of institutions and access to career information. A few participants indicated that they had thought about possible careers and revealed a 'foreclosed' identity (Marcia 1966) by having strong, preconceived ideas about possible careers. The ideas that shaped their identity at that point were, however, based on hearsay and perceptions rather than facts. Having been in the labour market for approximately five years allowed the participants to reflect on how and where their career paths commenced. These reflections revealed that their identities were marked by them entering HE without proactive thoughts about journeys into employment.

The participants' experiences in HE were characterised by them negotiating academic and financial challenges. Friends and families were highlighted as the most important support structures, while 'hard work' was considered a key strategy for their success in HE. Their hard work and resulting success contributed to their confidence and self-esteem. The participants' level of engagement with their HEIs varied and determined to what extent they allowed their identity formation to be influenced by their HE experiences. Little mention was made of engagement in extra-curricular activities, particularly by the FGSs. Those who did engage in such activities highlighted the invaluable contribution thereof to their identity formation. Postgraduate studies were considered a way of gaining positional advantage,

strengthening their graduate identity. Their perceptions of the status or quality of the institutions also shaped their graduate identities and the confidence with which they embarked on their search for employment.

The next two phases in the graduate journey, transition into employment and negotiation of employment, and those graduate trajectories were analysed to answer the second sub-question, namely the strategies employed to make the transition into employment. Whereas varied perspectives on institutional support during their years of study were reported, the participants' accounts of institutional support during the transition into employment were unanimous; there was no institutional support during this phase. Some mention was made of assistance with compiling CVs or preparing cover letters, but mostly the graduates were left to handle this phase on their own. Little structure in the search for employment was revealed. The transition was considered a difficult and challenging process which often left the graduates despondent. The graduate trajectories contributed to my understanding of what the graduates meant with 'a difficult and challenging process.'

The trajectories revealed the uniqueness of each transition into employment explicating the complexities of the transitions and the multitude of factors involved. FGSs in general presented longer and more complex journeys than non-first generation graduates. The graduates entering into professional careers had much easier transitions in terms of searching for employment than graduates who completed general formative programmes. Those with a professional career were either informed where to do their internships, as in doctors' and nurses' cases; or had signed a contract with a company prior to graduation, as in accountants' cases. Most other graduates used the internet or personal networks as sources for possible employment opportunities. For many, the first attempt to secure employment was unsuccessful and they had to persevere with the process. Although some did secure appropriate graduate employment with their first attempt, it did not necessarily happen immediately. Securing employment could take anything up to more than two years.

After securing employment the process of negotiating a career started. The participants alluded to being overwhelmed during the first months of employment. Those participants who were underemployed in their first position, continued with the

process of searching for more appropriate employment. Those who started off as interns, had to negotiate their careers to the next phase where they had to consider a permanent position. Those in graduate positions reflected on their programme choices and personal goals. The trajectories revealed how each journey was idiosyncratic and mostly complex. Very few journeys turned out to be straightforward.

The importance of a graduate identity and realising that this identity should be developed unceasingly as the journey continues was highlighted. The lack of support from HE in making the transition into employment was emphasised. I made the point that HE has a responsibility to support graduates in developing a graduate identity and as such contribute to the development of the graduate's employability; this is of particular importance for FGSs. However, I also acknowledged that HE cannot be solely responsible for the development of a graduate's employability. The personal agency of a graduate was recognised and I argued that the responsibility to become an employable graduate is in the first place that of the graduate. Graduates should ask themselves where they are heading with the qualifications they are working for and with the support of HE, and other stakeholders (parents, employers, government), make the transition into employment.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations that emanated from this article were informed by a sound theoretical approach, namely the graduate identity approach and therefore fulfil the criteria for phronetic research (Tomlinson & Holmes 2016). The knowledge contribution of this article is twofold and by expounding these two aspects I substantiate my claim to phronetic research. Firstly, on a theoretical level, I built on Holmes's (2015) work by considering the transition from HE into employment from a relational-constructionist perspective, using an interactionist conceptualisation of emergent identity. Throughout many years, Holmes (1995, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2013a, 2013b, 2015) has advocated the employment of the emergent identity approach to graduate employability as having the potential to improve our understanding of the graduate journey. He posits that such an understanding should form the basis for curriculum intervention (Holmes 2013a) including career advice (Holmes 2001). This should also include the development of a graduate vocabulary and institutional support in the establishment of a graduate identity.

I applied Holmes's (2000) claim-affirmation model to develop a graduate trajectory for each participant which enabled me to consider each one's postgraduation career trajectory in terms of modalities of emergent identity. The trajectories allowed me to develop an understanding of the biographical path taken by each participant and of the significance of the construction of a graduate identity before, during and beyond HE. The findings from this study support Holmes's (2015) conviction that the emergent identity approach to graduate employability is a fruitful line of enquiry regarding the transition from graduate to employee. In addition, I argue that the thematic analysis used in combination with the graduate trajectories strengthened the theoretical approach. The trajectories explicated the complexity of the journeys while the thematic analysis through rich descriptions contributed to an understanding of, for example, the duration to move from one modality to another in the trajectory and the graduates' emotions during the journey. The two stages of data analysis thus provided a detailed picture of each graduate's experience. The theoretical approach further supports the second knowledge contribution of this article.

Secondly, on a practical level, the analysis of the graduate trajectories highlights the relevance of HE's contribution to the formation of a graduate identity of a student. The silences about pro-active career thinking throughout the graduate journey and institutional support during the transition into employment are concerning. It seems as if thinking about employment only starts at the point of graduation when career services are no longer available. The process to secure employment and function in the world of work was mostly of a haphazard nature. A much more focused approach by HEIs is needed to inform students about the significance of a graduate identity and to contribute to the formation of such an identity. HE should be vigilant about the big 'gap' between graduation and employment as experienced by the graduates and should be assertive in their attempts to support graduates during this transition.

The second article follows chronologically on Article 1 as it focuses on a next phase of the graduate journey, namely the negotiation of early careers; it also answers the next two sub-questions. Although the focus is on a next phase in the graduate journey, I incorporate aspects of the whole journey into the data analysis since one phase is not detached from a previous or following phase. The article continues to detail the picture representing the experiences of graduates in the transition from

graduate to employee by considering how graduates continue to negotiate their career paths.

6.4 Article 2: *From graduate to employee: exploring graduates' careers from a career management perspective*

The second article employs a career management approach to graduate employability to analyse the data. The focus of the article is on the third and fourth sub-questions in order to complete the picture that represents the experiences of the 46 graduates during their transition into employment. To develop an understanding of the participants' perspective on their career success, and answer sub-question three, I analysed their career management processes. I also introduced the notion of a person's foreground (Skovsmose 2005) in addition to the career management processes, to explicate the participants' interpretations of their social, economic, political and cultural parameters with regard to career success. The data were analysed and presented in four steps constituting the career management process namely 1) career exploration, 2) career goals, 3) career strategies and 4) career appraisal, as well as a fifth category namely career success.

Reflecting on their graduate journeys, the participants acknowledged that they entered HE without pro-active thinking about future careers. Once again it became clear how FGSs' options were restricted due to limited subject availability or poor school performance. Some of the participants engaged unknowingly in career exploration activities during their time in HE, but career exploration was mostly only initiated at graduation. FGSs engaged even less with such activities as they just tried to survive. Although some participants' engagement with career exploration activities increased during their early career journeys, they did not necessarily realise that their actions or reflections were related to the notion of career exploration. Mostly, participants' negotiations of early career journeys were related to their interpretations of the possibilities or limitations of their employment within their foregrounds.

Participants' first career goal was to secure employment and that proved to be the most difficult part of the journey. Once in employment, career goals shifted slightly and reflected a focus on financial stability and on work-life balance. However, career goals were still strongly influenced by past realities which in most cases resulted in

goals focusing on an improved quality of life. Unknowingly, the participants engaged with career strategies in order to attain their goals. Some participants revealed engagement with strategies which are typified as 'major career strategies' (Callanan 2006). These included the development of new skills, working extended hours and being competent in one's job. On this journey, the participants interacted with mentors who provided valuable feedback in terms of their careers. Career appraisal also included self-reflection and observation of the work environment.

The analysis of the participants' career management processes indicated some engagement with aspects of career management after graduation. This engagement occurred regardless of an explicit knowledge of the notion of career management. Most negotiations of career journeys were rather due to an interpretation of foregrounds.

Career success was considered subjectively and was related to being happy and experiencing financial stability. For some, career success was related to reaching certain employment outcomes. Although there was evidence of career success linked to career management concepts such as person-occupation fit and self-management behaviours, career success was only rarely linked to career management processes.

Central to this article was the participants' perspectives of the value of HE with regard to their career management and success which relate to the fourth sub-question. HE was regarded as indispensable by the participants, but mostly in terms of securing employment and to a lesser extent to whole-person development. The participants revealed that the transition into employment was difficult and that they experienced a big 'gap' between HE and work.

The first recommendation in this article concerns the importance of exploring career opportunities related to fields of study. I make the point that students have to ask themselves where they are heading with tertiary education. I acknowledge that many FGSs are limited in terms of access to subject and career information due to a failed school system, amongst other reasons. In this regard, all stakeholders involved should become part of the solution in an attempt to ameliorate the lack of available information and/or guidance, particularly for FGSs.

With regard to a second recommendation, I have highlighted possible benefits of embedding career management processes into HE curricula. These benefits include reduced job-search time, improved quality of job applications and better income levels. I therefore recommend the incorporation of career management processes into HE curricula in order to contribute to the development of graduate employability. The embeddedness of career management processes into curricula will imply that students do not have to engage with 'extra' activities to develop their employability. Such development will occur organically as part of the HE experience. This will benefit students who feel overwhelmed and as a result do not engage in any activities outside the curriculum.

By making these recommendations, I do not imply that career success depends only on the contribution of HE to the graduate's employability. Personal agency and interpretations of structural factors played a determining role in the negotiation of early career paths. The transition into employment is complex and a career management process will not necessarily simplify the experience for all graduates. It might however streamline the experience for some graduates.

The knowledge contribution of this article lies in the strong connections with other studies in the field. Firstly, my conclusion that HE should engage in developing an explicit awareness of employability, and particularly integrate aspects of career management into curricula is highlighted in research on graduate employability (Bridgstock 2009; Graduate Management Admission Council 2015; O'Regan 2010; Thomas & Jones 2007). Secondly, the emphasis on lifestyle preferences and work-life balance by the participants is in line with research which points to work-life balance as central to discourses related to careers (Dwyer, Smith, Tyler & Wyn 2005; Dwyer, Tyler & Harwood 1999; Schein 2006; Wyn 2004). Thirdly, by employing the career management approach to graduate employability, I highlighted, similar to a number of other scholars (Bridgstock 2009; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios 2015; O'Regan 2010; Watts 2006), the value of a theory with roots in vocational psychology (King 2004) to inform HE about how to improve the preparation of employable graduates.

Fourthly, this article points towards certain shortcomings in considering graduate employability from a career management perspective, but in order to overcome

these shortcomings I introduce Skovsmose's (2005) notion of a person's foreground. This notion was initially developed to understand the intention of scholars with regard to mathematics learning. My knowledge contribution in this article thus includes the use of foreground in understanding aspects of graduate employability and perspectives on career success.

Fifthly, I contribute to the graduate employability debate by providing a practical way to explain the concept of employability to students and parents. The analysis of the graduate journey from a career management perspective explicates the graduate journey such that it is understandable to non-experts (parents, students) and highlights the importance of pro-active career thinking.

6.5 Findings from articles one and two

The data analysis from a graduate identity perspective (Article 1) regarding the strategies employed by the graduates to succeed in HE and to secure employment (sub-questions one and two), as well as the data analysis from a career management perspective (Article 2) regarding the graduates' perspectives on their career success and the value of HE with regard to their success (sub-questions three and four) allowed me to represent the 46 participants' experiences throughout their graduate journeys. I highlighted overlapping themes, but also idiosyncratic experiences. The transition from graduate to employee presented as complex, divergent and multi-layered journeys, particularly for FGSs, which they navigated with the support of friends, family and colleagues. The complexity of graduate employability was accentuated by the uniqueness of each journey. Many factors influencing this 'uniqueness' emerged during the data analysis namely field of study, generation attending HE, personal agency, socio-economic status, institutional reputation, engagement with extra-curricular activities during HE and the state of the labour market. A striking feature of most narratives on the graduate journeys was the lack of support from HEIs during this transition. This is concerning considering the ongoing debate regarding graduate employability.

In the next article I present the perspectives of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds on their experiences during the transition from graduate to employee. This is of substantive importance, since, as I explained in Chapter one, many

students in South Africa still come from communities where they are disadvantaged in terms of schooling and socio-economic status (Rogan & Reynolds 2015; Spaul 2013, 2015). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the focus on redress in the South African HE and labour market should imply better employment opportunities and more support in making transitions into employment for these graduates. This was however not the case. By considering the experiences of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, I was able to analyse their narratives from yet another theoretical perspective. This analysis allowed me to present “deep, dense, detailed accounts” (Denzin 1989:83) of the realities they had to cope with.

6.6 Article 3: Community cultural wealth and the professional success of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds

In this article I advanced the work of scholars (Jayakumar, Vue & Allen 2013; Kapp et al. 2014; Marshall & Case 2010; Norodien-Fataar 2016; O’Shea 2015; Pérez Huber 2009) who explain how students from disadvantaged backgrounds succeed in school, gain access to HE and graduate successfully by using their accumulated community resources and networks. I argue that graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds similarly use their community resources and networks to negotiate the search for employment and to navigate a successful career. By employing Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) approach, I was able to detail a picture of how these graduates experienced the transition into employment and what factors contributed to their career success. Since Norodien-Fataar (2016), Marshall and Case (2010), and others, had already explored access and success in HE, the focus in this article was specifically on the transition into employment (sub-question two) and the navigation of a successful career (sub-question three).

The data revealed that HE presented a way out of poverty and a key to a better life for these students. They graduated successfully and believed that with their HE qualifications doors will open and that they will always have jobs. However, their transitions into employment were neither simple nor linear, but rather complex journeys during which they relied on their family capitals to cope. The search for employment was marked by emotions of despondency and isolation. Families, including the extended family and community, provided both physical and emotional support which were instrumental for the graduates to persevere. Most of the

participants eventually secured employment through their social capitals. The social networks were utilised in at least three ways: by providing a job opportunity; by referring them to a contact with a possible job or by pointing out a vacancy. During the transition into employment, some participants were motivated by resistant capital. They were adamant to resist the status quo and to build a career that would provide a better future.

Once employed, the participants engaged with aspirational capital to activate their dreams and hope for the future. Their backgrounds shaped their perspectives on career success and their engagement with aspirational capital supported the attainment of their career success. Some participants alluded to their engagement with aspirational capital by remaining hopeful, despite the reality of struggling to secure graduate employment. Regardless of career goals, the participants revealed a strong sense of commitment towards family and community wellbeing and as such their engagement with family capital. Their commitment was evident in the way they defined career success – career success for them included to be able to care for parents and siblings and even the wider community.

The participants used their CCW to secure employment and build a career. They worked around their circumstances, often defined as ‘inadequate’ and ‘deficient’, and with the support of families and communities built their careers. However, the transition into employment and the navigation of career paths were more difficult than expected. Doors to good employment did not just open as they believed they would with a HE qualification. The participants did not reap the benefits of policies aiming at providing opportunities to them in the labour market. Although some participants were successful in their careers despite of their socio-economic position, others were still disadvantaged.

As in both previous articles, the graduates’ transitions were to some degree amenable to action taken by themselves signifying their agency. Their interpretations of structural factors impacted their transitions. The reality is thus that the participants succeeded in securing employment by engaging with CCW, but despite considerable support from families and communities the transitions remained challenging with, in some cases, less than satisfying employment outcomes. While I acknowledge all the factors impacting on the graduate journey, as explicated in Article 2, I argue that HE

has the potential and responsibility to support these graduates by focusing on the graduates' accumulated capitals as well as their agency and resilience to improve their employability and support them during the transition into employment. As part of HE's contribution to redress and social justice, we have the responsibility to initiate the development of these graduates' employability and lead the way in guiding them to take up their responsibility with regard to their own graduate journey.

The knowledge contribution of this article is firstly related to the extension of research conducted by Jayakumar, Vue and Allen (2013), Kapp et al. (2014), Marshall and Case (2010), Norodien-Fataar (2016), O'Shea (2015) and Pérez Huber (2009). As mentioned previously, these scholars considered students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their journeys from school into HE. They showed how the students completed secondary school, gained access to and succeeded in HE by using their community resources and networks. I extend the notion that students from disadvantaged backgrounds use capitals available to them to function in their social contexts to the next step of the graduate journey namely into employment. I showed how they engaged with their CCW not only to secure employment, but to further navigate their careers towards success. I argue that the CCW of students from disadvantaged backgrounds should not be regarded as deficient and inadequate in an educational context, but should be considered as the starting point of support.

A second knowledge contribution of this article lies in the connection to other studies in this field utilising Yosso's community cultural wealth theory in educational contexts as well as the possible implication of the use of this theory. Yosso's CCW theory, with its roots in critical race theory, has been employed by O'Shea (2015) to show how first-in-family students in Australia accessed and enacted success within university. Jayakumar, Vue and Allen (2013) similarly used CCW in a study about twenty-five middle- and higher-income Black college students gaining access to college. Pérez Huber (2009) explored how ten Chicana undergraduate students survived, resisted and navigated HE in the United States using CCW as an analytical lens. Leibowitz and others (2012) incorporated Yosso's CCW in their study of academics' accounts of their becoming good teachers. As indicated before (cf 6.2 Introduction), my initial intention with using Yosso's CCW was 'to understand', but it

produced more than that. I argue that in each of the cited articles, the employment of Yosso's CCW allows for a possibility of giving voice to these graduates who still do not 'buck the trend' of being from a disadvantaged background.

The third article strengthens the exploration of the experiences of first-time entrants into the labour market in the sense that it provides a third lens on a particular subset of the data. A detailed picture of the experiences of first-time entrants into the labour market was made even denser by focusing on the students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The findings in Article 3 corroborated findings in Articles 1 and 2 with regard to challenges experienced specifically by the FGSs. In Chapter 1 (cf.1.5.4 The participants), I have motivated the inclusion of a large sample of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds who were FGSs as well. (One FGS did not come from a disadvantaged background.) The focus on this subset is of particular importance in South Africa since everybody concerned about the redress of our unequal society should take note that support for these graduates is crucial.

6.7 The strength of the research

This research explored the experiences of graduates during their transition from graduation to first-time employment. I defined the graduate journey as from the point when a learner starts making decisions about which programme to follow in HE up to his/her early career. The journey thus constituted four phases namely 1) entry into HE, 2) experiences during HE, 3) transition into employment and 4) negotiation of employment. Four sub-questions considering the strategies employed during HE and the search for employment as well as perspectives on career success and the value of HE with regard to successful careers, guided the research. Although this was a small-scale study, the research was strengthened by 1) an appropriate methodological approach, 2) the use of three different theoretical frameworks, 3) a thorough data analysis supported by three theoretical frameworks, 4) a focus on a specific subset of the data, and 5) strong connections to existing studies.

Firstly, the interpretive paradigm was fit for purpose since it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of the graduates through their dense, detailed narratives. Their narratives were enhanced by retrospective reflection as they had been in the labour market for approximately five years. The semi-structured

interviews supported by my empathetic attitude and my aim to understand from an insider perspective worked well together to collect a host of rich data (cf. 1.5.7 Goodness of the study). The second strength relates to one of the criteria in Tomlinson and Holmes's (2016) 'manifesto for researching employability.' According to them research must be informed by sound theory and must produce knowledge with explanatory power. My research was informed by an overarching conceptual framework according to which graduate employability is seen as a developmental process throughout a graduate's life. The three theories, each with a unique perspective (graduate identity, career management processes, CCW), supported the overarching conceptual framework through the developmental and processual elements in each theory. Hence, the three theoretical approaches within the overarching conceptual framework provided a sound theoretical base to expound and develop an understanding of the participants' perspectives of their own employability and as such fulfilled Tomlinson and Holmes's criterion. The research further constituted phronetic research as it has possibilities for practical action which I will attend to in 6.8.

Thirdly, as already mentioned, the three theories provided three unique analytic lenses through which the data could be analysed. All data were analysed inductively for a first round where after three unique lenses, informed by theory, were used for three consecutive rounds of analysis. The use of three frameworks contributed to a thorough analysis of the data in order to develop a deeper understanding of the graduate journey. This was, fourthly, enhanced by considering a subset of the data which provided insight into the experiences of graduates from disadvantaged graduates. This subset forms a very important part of the study since it gives voice to these graduates who still struggle more than other graduates to find suitable employment despite efforts to support them to graduate and equity policies in the labour market.

Fifthly, even though the focus of qualitative research is not generalisability or transferability, the findings in this study connect to several large scale studies globally. In a recent study in Australia using around a million records of graduate data covering the period 1983–2014, Karmel and Carroll (2016) found that graduates are increasingly struggling to find full-time employment; that graduates are

increasingly facing underemployment and that students continue to enrol in programmes in which employment opportunities are decreasing. O'Leary and Sloane (2014) have also picked up on the increasing trend to underemploy graduates in the UK. Mok and Jiang (2016) have highlighted the importance of social capital in their study of macro-level and micro-level data from multiple sources in China. Britton, Dearden, Shephard and Vignoles (2016) call attention to the relation between institutional reputation and graduate earnings as well as higher unemployment rates amongst graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds. In SA, Rogan and Reynolds (2015) found that school history and race are associated with career choice and unemployment. I have highlighted a few of the most recent large-scale studies on graduate employability. All these support findings that were expounded in each of the articles. These strong connections to large scale, quantitative research enhance the value of this study.

6.8 Conclusions and recommendations

By now I believe I have advanced convincing arguments that graduate employability is a complex issue. Many factors are involved and many stakeholders are concerned. Numerous findings were made in the three articles and have been discussed in-depth. At this stage I want to pick up on the following salient points that emerged from the research:

- graduates do not think about future careers when they enter HE
- students and parents believe that a HE qualification guarantees good employment
- students believe postgraduate studies provide a positional advantage in the labour market
- there is little to no focus on graduate employability during HE
- a gap exists between graduation day and first-time employment
- there is little to no support from HE during the transition into employment
- students from disadvantaged backgrounds still struggle more to capitalise on the benefits of HE for employability than their peers.

Where does this leave us in terms of the future and possible actions?

The reality about graduate employability needs to be made explicit to students and their parents. The perception that a graduate journey constitutes getting a HE qualification and walking into a graduate job is a fallacy. The graduate journey in reality constitutes pro-active thoughts about possible career opportunities, exploration of fields of study, a deliberate development of a graduate profile which is attractive to future employers and a deliberate development of social networks during HE. The search for employment and presentation of oneself to possible employers form part of the journey and needs careful preparation and perseverance. This journey is not simple or easy for any graduate, not even for those with professional or postgraduate qualifications.

Hence, graduates need to be realistic about their expectations of the graduate journey, and more importantly, take responsibility for their own journeys and the development of their graduate employability. This may seem like a tall order for graduates, particularly in South Africa where many graduates are limited by their schooling or socio-economic circumstances. However, as a first step graduates need to take note of the complexities of a graduate journey and should acknowledge their own responsibility. The transition from HE into employment requires an active involvement from them (Sumanasiri et al. 2015).

With regard to postgraduate studies, graduates with masters and doctoral degrees did not have easier transitions into employment in comparison to those with undergraduate qualifications or honours degrees. I suggest that further research is needed to investigate the transition of masters and doctoral graduates into employment. If masters and doctoral graduates struggle to secure appropriate employment in SA, what does this reveal about the South African labour market, and how appropriate are the plans and projections for huge growth in masters and doctoral graduates?

Let me turn to the next stakeholder in this complex issue, namely HE. I have made the point in the introduction that HE plays a pivotal role in the development of graduate employability, particularly in SA. The participants in the study were very explicit about their perceptions on HE's lack of involvement in any aspects related to

graduate employability or the transition into employment. I have previously mentioned pockets of initiatives pertaining to the development of graduate employability in HE, but none of the participants in this study reported having been exposed to any such activities. It is evident that a more focused and inclusive approach to graduate employability is needed in HE.

A clear link exists between individual learning and institutional integration of enterprise, personal and career development (Sumanasiri et al. 2015). I have no doubt in my mind that an integrated approach to graduate employability would go a long way to develop graduates' employability. It is here that my research can be put into action. I have shown that integrating the development of a graduate identity as well as career management processes into the HE curriculum would benefit graduates' development of employability. The concept of graduate identity can be incorporated within career management processes.

A very important part of this research is the focus on graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds. I have motivated this focus within the South African context of a very unequal society. South African HE has a responsibility towards these graduates. Based on the multitude of interventions to provide access to HE and to support them to graduate successfully HE has taken up that responsibility. However, these interventions are seriously lacking in terms of graduate employability and support in making the transition into employment. I have pointed out that while some FGSs do succeed in securing employment, they still lag behind their peers in terms of duration to find employment, quality of jobs, remuneration and so forth, and this occurs despite government policies to open opportunities to black, coloured and Indian graduates in the labour market. The gap is evident. They do enter into HE; the labour market is waiting for them, but between HE and the labour market many are lost. I recommend a focused approach to the employability development of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds by using the capitals with which they enter HE. This would include a specific focus on the expansion of their social capital as the importance of social networks reaching beyond family and friends has been made explicit in research (Britton et al. 2016; Mok & Jiang 2016).

As an aside, since the majority of students in the South African HE system are considered disadvantaged or unprepared or non-traditional, perhaps it is time to

redefine South African students. Instead of categorising students as either advantaged or disadvantaged, should we not rather consider the 'South African student'? I contend that we need to develop a profile of a South African student and interrogate his/her needs against the background of the needs of our country. Instead of having initiatives to support the *not* traditional or *not* prepared student in order to fit in with the minority who are considered 'traditional', the focus should be on the South African student. This perspective ties in with an approach followed at Georgia State University. Georgia State University realised that they cannot expect the new generation of students to fit into the university but that the institution had to change to fit in with the students. They defied conventional approaches to students which merely perpetuated inequalities, as shown in my study, and incorporated strategies with a specific focus on extensive career guidance in support of the 'new' students (Jenvey 2016).

So far I have addressed graduates and parents, and the HE system. What about employers as stakeholders in graduate employability? Most of the participants referred to much support once in employment. It does seem as if employers take responsibility for the graduates once in employment. This, however, does not address the most difficult aspect of the graduate journey namely to secure employment and to make the transition into employment. The struggle to find employment is exacerbated by employers' institutional preference as alluded to by participants and confirmed in research. Research into employers' contribution to alleviate graduates' challenges in making the transition into employment would be insightful. Another aspect that needs attention is how employers view graduates' results and the time taken to complete their qualification. Even though many disadvantaged students get access to HE they are, due to a number of factors, often unable to acquire a qualification in minimum time. How do employers regard a qualification that was meant to be acquired in three years, but eventually took six years?

At the end of this journey can I claim that any or all of these recommendations will in fact guarantee employment or an easier journey for graduates into employment? No, unfortunately not. I am aware of students who have developed their graduate employability and have engaged in a variety of activities and interventions during HE,

but still struggled to find employment. Does this then mean we should do nothing? The answer is also 'no.' Fazal Rizvi (2004) speaks of everyone's responsibility to build bridges towards each other if our aim is social justice. I would like to apply his metaphor to the issue of graduate employability in SA. Graduates can potentially play a critical role in the development of a more equal society and an improved economy in SA. All of us should take up the responsibility to support graduates in executing their role. I do believe that HE inclusive of management, staff as well as policymakers, can and should take the first step in building bridges in support of graduates making the transition into employment, particularly those graduates who are limited by external structural factors.

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Appendix A:

Interview schedule

A. On higher education (10 min)

1. What was the secret to your success in HE?
 - a. What challenges did you experience? How did you overcome these challenges?
 - b. How did your institution help you to be a successful student?
2. How did you decide on the course you chose?
 - a. What did you know about the work related to the course?
 - b. Did you think about employability prospects when you chose the course?

B. On securing employment (10 min)

1. Explain the process to securing your first job.
 - a. Which factor/practices/anything was the one thing that helped you most to acquire work?
 - b. What approach did you follow?
 - c. Did you feel confident that you will secure work relatively easy? Explain?
 - d. How long after graduation were you employed?
 - e. Did anybody assist you?
 - f. Did you have a CV? Who helped you setting up your CV?
 - g. Did you have any prior work experience?
 - h. Did you do volunteer work/service learning?
 - i. Were you linked to a certain job through a bursary/contract?

C. On professional success (10 min)

1. Explain your first month in your new employment?
 - a. Were you prepared for the world of work? Motivate.
 - b. What were you never told?

2. Are you successful? Why?
 - a. Which factor/practices/anything was the one thing that helped you most to be successful in your work?
3. How do you navigate the working world and build your career?
4. Would you consider yourself as being civically engaged/socially responsible citizen?

D. On higher education and its relation to work (5 min)

1. Does your HE studies assist you in being successful in your current career? How?
 - a. Does your job relate to your achieved degree?
 - b. Did you acquire any technical skills during your undergrad years? If so, describe (define the term technical skills). Did it help you in your job?
 - c. Did you acquire any generic skills during your undergrad years? If so, describe (define the term generic skills). Did it help you in your job?
2. Was the amount of money spent on HE worth it?
3. What could HEIs do/add to better prepare graduates for employment?

Appendix B: Permission to conduct research at CPUT



Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor:
Research, Technology Innovation & Partnerships
Bellville Campus
P O Box 1906
Bellville 7535
Tel: 021-9596242
Email: NhlapoC@cput.ac.za

11 August 2015

Ms E Lourens
49 Lovell Avenue
Die Boord
Stellenbosch
7600
Email: EL3@sun.ac.za

Dear Ms E Lourens,


RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT CPUT

The Institutional Ethics Committee received your application, together with the dossier of supporting documents.

Permission is herewith granted for you to do research at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

For any queries, please feel free to contact my office.

Sincerely


Dr C Nhlapo
Chair: Senate Ethics Committee



Appendix C: Ethical clearance from UCT



Humanities Postgraduate and Research Office University of Cape Town

Humanities Faculty Ethics in Research Committee

Room 104, Beattie
Private Bag X3 Rondebosch 7701
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 3718
E-mail: Robyn.Udemans@uct.ac.za

Ref. No.: HUMREC201506-08

22nd June 2015

Ms Elza Lourens
Centre for Pedagogy
Stellenbosch University
Private Bag X1
Matieland
7602

Dear Ms Lourens,

RE: Ethical Clearance for Research Project

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been granted by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your research project entitled: 'From graduate to employee: exploring the journeys of first-time entrants into the labour market'.

I wish you all the best with your study.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Prinsloo'.

Associate Professor M Prinsloo
Chair, Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee

Appendix D:

Permission for research access to UCT students

	RESEARCH ACCESS TO STUDENTS	DSA 100
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NOTES

1. This form must be **FULLY** completed by all applicants that want to access UCT students for the purpose of research.
2. Return the fully completed (a) **DSA 100** application form by email, in the same word format, together with your: (b) **research proposal inclusive of your survey**, (c) **copy of your ethics approval letter / proof** (d) **informed consent letter** to: Moonira.Khan@uct.ac.za You application will be attended to by the Executive Director, Department of Student Affairs (DSA), UCT.
3. The turnaround time for a reply is **approximately 10 working days**.
4. NB: It is the responsibility of the researcher/s to apply for and to obtain **ethics approval and to comply with amendments that may be requested**; as well as to **obtain** approval to access UCT staff and/or UCT students, from the following, at UCT, respectively: (a) **Ethics**: Chairperson, Faculty Research Ethics Committee' (FREC) for ethics approval, (b) **Staff access**: Executive Director: HR for approval to access UCT staff, and (c) **Student access**: Executive Director: Student Affairs for approval to access UCT students.
5. **Note**: UCT Senate Research Protocols requires compliance to the above, **even if prior approval has been obtained from any other institution/agency**. UCT's research protocol requirements applies to *all* persons, institutions and agencies from UCT and external to UCT who want to conduct research on human subjects for academic, marketing or service related reasons at UCT.
6. Should approval be granted to access UCT students for this research study, such approval is effective for a period of one year from the date of approval (as stated in Section D of this form), and the approval expires automatically on the last day.
7. The approving authority reserves the right to revoke an approval based on reasonable grounds and/or new information.

SECTION A: RESEARCH APPLICANT/S DETAILS

Position	Staff / Student No	Title and Name	Contact Details (Email / Cell / land line)
A.1 Student Number	SU /10953442	Mrs Elza Lourens	El3@sun.ac.za/0824134408/0218082608
A.2 Academic / PASS Staff No.			
A.3 Visitor/ Researcher ID No.			
A.4 University at which a student or employee	Stellenbosch University	Address if <u>not</u> UCT: Stellenbosch University, Private Bag X1, Matieland, 7602	
A.5 Faculty/ Department/School	Curriculum Studies, Faculty of Education, Stellenbosch University		
A.6 APPLICANTS DETAILS If different from above	Title and Name	Tel.	Email

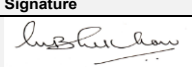
SECTION B: RESEARCHER/S SUPERVISOR/S DETAILS

Position	Title and Name	Tel.	Email
B.1 Supervisor	Prof Magda Fourie-Malherbe	0218083908	mfourie@sun.ac.za
B.2 Co-Supervisor/s			

SECTION C: APPLICANT'S RESEARCH STUDY FIELD AND APPROVAL STATUS



C.1 Degree – if applicable	PhD
C.2 Research Project Title	From graduate to employee: exploring the journeys of first-time entrants into the labour market.
C.3 Research Proposal	Attached: Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
C.4 Target population	2010 graduates of UCT
C.5 Lead Researcher details	If different from applicant:
C.6 Will use research assistant/s	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If yes- provide a list of names, contact details and ID no. Ilze Lourens, 0609620459, ID: 9505130055089
C.7 Research Methodology and Informed consent:	Research methodology: Pragmatic, integrated methodology Informed consent: Participants will sign a consent letter
C.8 Ethics clearance status from UCT's Faculty Ethics Research Committee (FREC)	Approved by the FREC Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> With amendments: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (a) Attach copy of your ethics approval. Attached: Yes (b) State date and reference no. of ethics approval: Date: 22 June 2015 Ref. No.: HUMREC201506-08

SECTION D: APPLICANT/S APPROVAL STATUS FOR ACCESS TO STUDENTS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSE
(To be completed by the ED, DSA or Nominee)

D.1 APPROVAL STATUS	Approved / With Terms / Not (i) Approved <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (ii) With terms <input type="checkbox"/> (iii) Not approved <input type="checkbox"/>	* Conditional approval with terms (a) Access to students for this research study must only be undertaken after written ethics approval has been obtained. (b) In event any ethics conditions are attached, these must be complied with <u>before</u> access to students.	Applicant/s Ref. No.: SU/10953442/Mrs Elza Lourens
D.2 APPROVED BY:	Designation Executive Director Department of Student Affairs	Name Dr Moonira Khan	Signature 
			Date of Approval 6 July 2015

Appendix E:

Permission to conduct research at UWC

 UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE	OFFICE OF THE DEAN DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT
24 June 2015	
To Whom It May Concern	
I hereby certify that the Senate Research Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the following research project by: Dr C Howell (Institutional Planning)	
Research Project:	Qualitative study to examine the factors that influence and shape the professional success of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds..
Registration no:	15/4/4
Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.	
The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.	
	
<i>Ms Patricia Josias Research Ethics Committee Officer University of the Western Cape</i>	
Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, South Africa T: +27 21 959 2988/2948 . F: +27 21 959 3170 E: pjiosias@uwc.ac.za www.uwc.ac.za	
A place of quality, a place to grow, from hope to action through knowledge	

Appendix F: Ethical clearance from US



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

Approved with Stipulations New Application

16-Jan-2015
LOURENS, Elza

Proposal #: DESC/Lourens/Jan2015/1

Title: From graduate to employee: exploring the journeys of first-time entrants into the labour market

Dear Mrs Elza LOURENS,

Your **New Application** received on **12-Dec-2014**, was reviewed
Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: **15-Jan-2015 -14-Jan-2016**

The following stipulations are relevant to the approval of your project and must be adhered to:
Access to personal information

The researcher must obtain a formal letter of permission from the participating institutions or supplier of information in order to access personal email addresses, contact information or personal information. A copy of this letter(s) must be submitted to the REC for record-keeping. This request is made in context of the Protection of Personal Information Act.

Please provide a letter of response to all the points raised IN ADDITION to HIGHLIGHTING or using the TRACK CHANGES function to indicate ALL the corrections/amendments of ALL DOCUMENTS clearly in order to allow rapid scrutiny and appraisal.

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number (DESC/Lourens/Jan2015/1)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 218089183.

Included Documents:

Informed consent form

Appendix G: Institutional permission from US



30 January 2015

Ms Elza Lourens
SUNCEP
Faculty of Education
Stellenbosch University

Dear Ms Lourens

Concerning research project: *From graduate to employee: examining the factors that determine the professional success of graduate from disadvantaged backgrounds*

The researchers have institutional permission to proceed with this project as stipulated in the institutional permission application. This permission is granted on the following conditions:

- The researchers must obtain ethical clearance before commencing with this study.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Persons may not be coerced into participation.
- Persons who choose to participate must be informed of the purpose of the research, all the aspects of their participation, the risks to participation, their role in the research and their rights as participants. Participants must consent to participation. The researchers may not proceed until they are confident that all the before mentioned has been established and recorded.
- Persons who choose not to participate may not be penalized as a result of non-participation.
- Participants may withdraw their participation at any time, and without consequence.
- The data must be responsibly and suitably protected.
- The researchers must pay due diligence in seeing that the data is handled in the strictest confidence.
- The use of the collected data may not be extended beyond the purpose of this study.
- Individuals may not be identified in the report(s) or publication(s) of the results of the study.
- The privacy of individuals must be respected and protected.
- The researchers must conduct their research within the provisions of the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013.

Best wishes,

Prof Ian Cloete
Senior Director: Institutional Research and Planning



Afdeling Institusionele Navorsing en Beplanning • Institutional Research and Planning Division
Privaatsak/Private Bag X1 • Stellenbosch • 7602 • Suid-Afrika/South Africa
Tel. + 27 21 808 3967 • Faks/Fax + 27 21 808 4533



Appendix H:

Graduate participant consent letter



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jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

From graduate to employee: exploring the journeys of first-time entrants into the labour market.

You are requested to participate in a research study conducted by Elza Lourens (MEd), from the Department of Curriculum Studies at Stellenbosch University. The results of the study will form part of a doctoral thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you were part of graduation destination survey conducted by the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) in 2012.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

South African higher education (HE) institutions have the challenging task of delivering graduates to be productive and responsible citizens able to contribute to society and the economy. Preparing graduates for first-time employment is a critical function of HE and requires a deeper understanding of what needs to happen at university that will enhance graduates' employability and their success in the workplace. Exploring the journeys of first-time entrants into the labour market may guide our thinking about which actions matter most in HE, how to organise and implement these actions, and what changes are needed in HE.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to consent to be interviewed by Elza Lourens for approximately forty minutes.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

None

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The narratives describing these journeys may inform HE institutions which interventions are effective in developing the employability of graduates and what is still lacking in developing employability.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive no payment as participant to the study.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of keeping all collected data in a secure folder.

If you consent to the recording of the interview you will have access to all interview data in order to review the data. Except for Elza Lourens the data will only be accessible to a transcriber who will also keep the data confidential.

The findings of the research will be published in a doctoral thesis, but you will not be identified in the thesis or any other publications emanating from the study.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to participate in this study or not. If you volunteer to participate, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this study if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Elza Lourens (0218082608/0824134408).

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a

research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was explained to me by Elza Lourens in English/Afrikaans. I am in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to [name of participant]. She/he was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English/Afrikaans by Elza Lourens.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix I:

Abbreviations used in identifiers of participants

BA – Bachelor of Arts

B Acc – Bachelor of Accounting

B Curr – Bachelor of Nursing Science

B Com – Bachelor of Commerce

B Ed – Bachelor of Education

B Eng – Bachelor of Engineering

Bio – Biology

Biotech – Biotechnology

B Sc – Bachelor of Science

B Soc Sc – Bachelor of Social Science

B Tech – Bachelor of Technology

Eng – Engineering

Environ – Environmental

Hons – Honours

IT – Information Technology

LLB – Bachelor of Laws

LLD – Doctor of Laws

MA – Master of Arts

MSc – Master of Science

MBChB – Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery

MChD – Master of Dentistry

ND – National Diploma

NHC – National Higher Certificate

PGD – Postgraduate Diploma

PGCE – Postgraduate Certificate in Education

PhD – Doctor of Philosophy

Proj Man – Project Management